

S E R M O N S

ON THE

Following S U B J E C T S,

V I Z.

Of the vanity of human life.

Of man's ignorance of what
is good for him.

The vanity of the present state
consistent with the perfec-
tions of God.

Of Abraham's offering up his
son.

On the sufficiency of a stand-
ing revelation to bring men
to repentance.

Of inconsideration.

The causes of corruptions a-
mong Christians.

The corruptions among Chri-
stians no good objection a-
gainst the gospel.

By the late Rev. Mr. HENRY GROVE,
of TAUNTON.

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BY THE HON. MR. HENRY GLOVE
OF NEW YORK.

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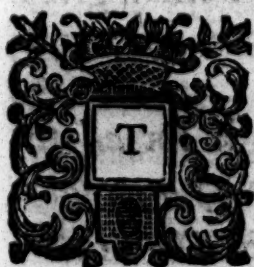


S E R M O N I.

Of the vanity of human LIFE, appearing in an *absolute* view of it.

ECCLESS. VI. 12.

Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?



THE order and coherence of these words will appear easy and natural, if we only understand them as an inference which the royal preacher makes from the preceding part of his discourse; in the entrance into which he lays down this general proposition, *that all is vanity*. The whole circle of enjoyments under the sun, every thing which has relation *only* to this life is vanity. This he exemplifies and proves in respect of the *wisdom, pleasures, honours, power and riches* of the world; which never make men truly

and compleatly happy; so far from it, as to be very often the occasions of a great deal of care, vexation and disquietude: from whence he concludes, *therefore* (not *for*, which is our translation) *who knoweth what is good for man in this life?* Since the nature of those things which are most generally admired and pursued by the children of men is such, that they may prove *hurtful* as well as *beneficial*: and are not so frequently the means of contentment and happiness, as the contrary; who, that considers this, will pretend to say what is *good for man*, for himself, or for any other man *in this life*; *all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?*

WE may here observe several things.

I. THE *account* which the Wiseman gives us of the *present life*. It is *a vain life*, and *spent as a shadow*.

II. AN *inquiry* natural enough for *all* to make, and, *rightly* managed, *very necessary and useful*, (viz.) *What is good for man in this life?*

III. THE *ignorance* of man in this important point. *Who knoweth?* that is, no one knoweth *what is good for man in this life*.

I. LET us for a while consider, and revolve in our minds the account which the Wiseman gives us of the present life. It is *a vain life*, and *spent as a shadow*.

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THE life of man is *vain*. Take it as we find it in *fact*, and as it proves to the greater part of mankind, *mostly* indeed thro' their *own* fault and folly; and there is nothing of truth and substance in any thing belonging to it. The idols of the heathen are in scripture called ^a *vanities*, because they had *only* the *name* of *God*, without any of the *perfections* included in the notion of Deity. So here, the *names of happiness, wisdom, and the like* (which are intended to denote the excellency and value of the things which pass under these titles) are most wretchedly *misapplied* to the things of this life, and the conduct of men about them. In effect, it is all but *vanity*, and a *lie*. The life of man is *vain*, of *man*, who is the noblest part of the visible creation, the *offspring* of *God*, made in his *image*, and like him in dominion and immortality; the life of this *noble* creature is *vain*, and more *vain* as he is more noble. The life of the *greatest* as well as of the *meanest* of the sons of men is *vain*. Men may be distinguished in other regards, but not in this. One may possess what another has not, but *vanity* has alike the possession of them all. And if men are set in high places, the eminence of their condition only serves to render the vanity of the present life the more conspicuous.

^a Jerem. xiv. 22.

4 Of the Vanity of human Life. VOL. II.

LIFE may be shown to be vain, whether we consider it *absolutely*, or *comparatively*.

I. LIFE, considered *absolutely*, is a *vain* thing; and to be convinced that it is, we need only take a short view of the *labours* of life, its several *stages*, its *variable nature*, and its *fleeting* and *uncertain* duration.

I. VAIN are the *labours* of this life;
^b *For what profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? and of the vexation of his heart?* which is the addition made to the same question, *Eccles. ii. 22.* He labours even to *vexation*; but what is the fruit of all his anxious toil, his restless thoughts, his never-ending pursuits? After all, we find, we tread the same enchanted round, and that every point in the circle is vanity. So that we may well do as the Wiseman, *who caused his heart to despair of all the labour which he took under the sun.* He began his career full of *hope*, pleasing himself with the expectation of great good to come, and ended it in *despair*, in utter despair of finding what he laboured for in the objects and enjoyments among which he sought it. That is vain which is *empty* and *unprofitable*; and of this character are the labours of this mortal life. We labour, and do *not obtain*; or we obtain, and are sadly *disappointed*; and is not our labour then alike *in vain* in both cases?

I. VERY

^b Eccl. i. 3.

§ ii. 20.

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I. VERY often we labour and do not obtain: like the disciples who toiled all night and caught nothing, we are very thoughtful and busy, and all to no purpose. In such fruitless labours do some men consume a great part of their lives, the object of their wishes flies before them, and perhaps, after they are come up so near it, as to be just able to put forth their hand and seize on the expected good, it is in a moment gone, and appears at as great a distance as ever. O vain life! to be condemned to perpetual labour! *exercised with sore travel!* still to pursue, seldom or never to overtake! But let us have a care how we argue from this vanity of human labour. Let us not presently repine against the Maker and Governour of the world, as if things were not rightly ordered; because labour is not always successful. For what are those labours which are so frequently in vain? Are they the labours and difficulties to be incountred in the practice of *virtue*, and the vanquishing temptations? the labours of *faith* and *love*, the labours we go thro' in *religion*? O no! these are *never in vain*. When was it ever known that God said to the ^d *seed of Jacob, seek ye my face in vain?* When did any ^e *hunger and thirst after righteousness*, and were not *filled*? strive against sin, and did not overcome? When did any

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^d Isai. xlv. 19.

^e Matt. v. 6.

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one ^f labour for the bread that endureth to everlasting life, aspire to the honour that cometh from God, covet earnestly the true riches, and not obtain them? When did any man labour to please God, and save his soul, and yet missed of his aim? We have the greatest reason to be ^s stedfast, and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. If men strive for things impossible, the blame must lie on themselves; or if they bestow their care and labour where they ought not, or on things less necessary, neglecting those of infinitely greater moment; they have no cause to be surprized, or angry that Providence baffles their designs, but rather thankful for the instruction which they may receive from hence, and to resolve that they will turn their thoughts and concern another way, in which they have a greater certainty of succeeding. And provided they take this course, the success they meet with in the grand affair of all, which touches them most nearly, comprehending their whole interest and happiness in it, and in other things, as far as they have a connexion with and are subservient to the principal, will both make them abundant amends for their little success in more trivial matters, (for such in reality are all the affairs and business of this world) and dispose them to sit down content under

^f John vi. 27.

^s 1 Cor. xv. 58.

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der it, having secured their most important stake.

2. VAIN are the labours of this life, even tho' *we obtain* the things for which we labour, because having obtained them, *we are disappointed in our expectations*; sadly perceiving that ^h we have *spent our labour for that which satisfieth not*; that we have really ⁱ *sown the wind, and reaped the whirlwind*. This is meant of all those expectations which exceed the value of the object. The observation of *Solomon* in the text, and other places of this book, was made before him by his father *David*. ^k *Every man at his best estate is altogether vanity. Surely every man walketh in a vain show; surely they are disquieted in vain*. It is but an empty appearance with which we are surrounded. That which was thought to be solid, is found to be light as air; that which *raised* our desires, cannot *satisfy* them. ^l *The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing*. The senses do not find their full contentment in their proper objects, much less can the soul find its repose in the objects of sense, which are so very unsuitable to its nobler nature. As to many things, their value is only *imaginary*, being of little or no use to supply our real wants; consequently the price which they

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bear

^h Isai. lv. 2.
5, 6.

ⁱ Hof. viii. 7.
^j Eccles. i. 8.

^k Psal. xxxix.

8 *Of the Vanity of human Life.* VOL. II.

bear in our imaginations before we were acquainted with them, they, in a great measure, lose when we come to enjoy them. Experience proves the delusion: for, tho' ^m a *good name* (a name founded in good actions, and which puts into a greater capacity for doing good) *is better than precious ointment*; yet things we usually mean by the words, *fame, honour, greatness, &c.* abstracting from the use we make of them, are of small value in the judgment of the *reflecting* mind, and argue a *littleness* and *poorness* of soul in those who admire them: nor can they give a lasting satisfaction even to these, since it is only their *novelty* which recommends them. And this is the reason that men are still contending for new degrees of them, in hope the higher they are, the better they shall like their condition; tho' when highest, they find themselves as much below the heaven they aimed at as ever. As to other things which being suited to the appetites and senses of the body, are fitted to afford some degree of pleasure, how inconsiderable is the pleasure they give? and how soon past? Then dissatisfaction ensues, greater as the pleasure has been over-rated by our expectations; and if *guilt* has been mixed with the pleasure, that which was sweet in the mouth, quickly turns to gall and wormwood. ⁿ *I said of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, what does it?* This is the sum total of

^m Eccles. ii. 1.

ⁿ Eccles. ii. 1, 10.

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of the happiness resulting from sensual pleasure, according to *Solomon's* account of it, who indulged his eyes in *whatever they desired, and with-held not from them any joy.* As to riches, if not used, they are to be numbred among those things which derive all their value from a foolish fancy, and they are sometimes ° *kept by the owners of them to their hurt.* If they are made subservient to pleasure only, every observation on the vanity of pleasure includes them also. If employed in doing good, it is not the bare *possession* of wealth, but the *right application* of it, which is the foundation of the satisfaction we thus enjoy. It is a truth as plain almost as any self-evident proposition, that riches, when loved for their own sakes, or merely as instruments of sensuality or ambition, are downright vanity. Nay, of *wisdom* itself, when it is merely human and earthly, terminating its views in the present life, it may be truly said, it is vain : since ^p *in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increases knowledge, increases sorrow.* He has a quicker perception of the evils of life, sees as well as feels the vanity of it, and blushes at his own folly in doating upon things which at the same time in his real judgment he cannot but despise.

BUT by *accusing these* things, do we not *accuse* the *author* of them ? Is not the world the workmanship of God ? Has he not sent

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° Ecclef. v. 13.

^p Ecclef. i. 18.

us into it, and furnished it for our entertainment? given us various appetites and inclinations, by which we are prompted to pursue after every good, and various senses which capacitate us for the enjoyment of it? And if the feast does not answer the cost, if after so much preparation there be little or nothing in the entertainment, where does the reflection fall? I answer, not on the *wise God*, but on *foolish man*, who *mistakes* that for his *final portion*, which was only *designed* for his *refreshment* and *support* by the way; values the riches of nature and providence beyond those of virtue and grace; and what he should use with prudence, and court with moderation, and a sort of disengagement of soul, abuses to the strengthening his passions, the pampering his lust, and enslaving his reason. And can he justly wonder if he has little satisfaction in all this? He would have *more* pleasure and satisfaction from these things, than *God* ever *designed* they should give him, and by that means receives *less*. Thus the labours of life are vain, when we labour to acquire happiness in the things of this world. It was the intention of nature, that we should have some pleasure in them, nor does religion wage war with pure uncorrupted nature. But opinion magnifies the pleasure beyond nature, and makes us look for it in things wherein nature has not placed it; and lust and passion prevailing, make men leap over all bounds in the chase

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chase of pleasure. They refine upon the plain and frugal provisions of nature, and study how to improve the enjoyment of sensual pleasure, into a kind of art or science. And what is the result of all their labours and inventions? Why, that they spoil their natural pleasures, fill their breasts with turbulent passions, muddy the spring of which they drink, and whatever pleasures they make their boast of, are farther than ever from real happiness and contentment.

2. WE shall acknowledge that life is vain, if we travel over the several *stages* of it, *childhood, youth, manhood, and old age*; each of these has some *peculiar* marks of vanity, as well as others *common* to them all.

CHILDHOOD is *vanity*. And it is not at all strange, that we should find vanity where we do *not* find *reason*, or only the first dawns of it. The *faculty* of reason exists as soon as the soul does, but is not exercised till a long time after. We first enter upon the life of sense, and for some years are acquainted but with few ideas and thoughts, but those which have their original from sense: And surely a life of *mere* sense, in a creature enjoying the faculty of reason, is but a vain life. Nor is it much better, tho' we add fancy; for what can be vainer than those scenes, which are raised and presented by imagination? The happiness or misery of children, is, generally speaking, little more than fancy; a small matter
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pleases them, and one as small puts them out of humour ; nay, the same thing, in the space of a day, or an hour, shall both please and displease. The very *afflictions* of childhood, as well as the *amusements* and *pleasures*, are a diversion to the spectator. This also is vanity, but a vanity that is consistent with innocence and safety. Other things may be observed, which lead to sin, and are the sad prognosticks and forerunners of errors and miscarriages in the following part of life. We see in children those humours, and inclinations, and passions, which give their friends a great many painful thoughts and apprehensions on their accounts. These things are something worse than vain, because they lead to more important evils. This calls aloud upon those who have the care of children, to season their tender minds with good instruction, to oppose any wrong propensities at their first appearance, to clear the garden before the weeds have quite over-run it, and either to plant the principles of virtue and religion, or to cultivate those already sown. By this means, together with the vanity that is inseparable from childhood, there will be seeds and blossoms which will promise fruit of a more salutary kind.

YOUTH is in some sense *vainer* than childhood ; for although reason by this time unfolds itself, and in some few is of considerable use, the *passions* are in most much *stronger*
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than reason. ⁹ *Remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity.* The word *sorrow*, or *anger*, seems in this place to be put for all those headstrong and ungoverned passions by which man is besieged, and too often surprized and hurried away in his youthful years. With these passions of the mind it concerns us to declare war betimes, and to guard against the temptations to fleshly ease and sensual pleasure, (here called the evil of the flesh.) We are very much to blame, if we do not carefully watch against these things, since *childhood and youth are vanity*. Young people are apt to be deceiv'd by the flatteries of the world, and carried headlong in the pursuit of the objects of their several passions, to the endangering of their souls, if the fear of God, as a bridle upon their youthful lusts, does not restrain them. And then, as youth is vanity, because of the passions incident to that age of life, so likewise upon the account of its levity and inconstancy *; prone to change, it loaths what a little before it eagerly desir'd, quits the thing almost as soon as it has obtained it, and does not more admire and esteem it at a distance, than when present it despises it, and, perhaps, both equally without reason. Youth is also vain, because generally † deaf to good advice

⁹ Eccles. xi. 10.

* *Amata relinquere Pernix.*

† *Cereus in vitium flecti, monitoribus asper.*

advice, and easily flexible to bad. The reason of which is, that one contradicts their favourite inclinations, the other falls in with them ; one would keep them within bounds, the other breaks down the barriers, and gives them liberty to range uncontrolled. Youth also is vain, because apt to feed itself with *vain hopes* ; hopes of things *impossible* or *hurtful*. It is seldom an enquiry is made, whether the fancied good be in their reach ; it is enough that it *pleases*, and therefore they must have it. What makes the matter still worse is, that young persons are usually as fickle and inconstant in worthy and laudable attempts, as in things indifferent. They sometimes resolve well, but have seldom that steadiness of mind which is required to the prosperous execution of their commendable purposes and designs. Does not all this, laid together, prove that youth is vanity ? And is this vanity of youth necessary and unavoidable ? Some part of it may, but not all ; not that for which they deserve to be *blamed*, as they do for every thing contrary to the precepts of reason and religion. Would they raise a bank which may secure them against that flood of vanity to which they are exposed, let them converse with greater caution and sobriety ; call to mind their obligations to *remember their creator in the days of their youth*, and the many advantages this will yield them ; use themselves

^r Eccles. xii. 1.

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more to serious consideration, and particularly ponder that passage of the wise preacher †, *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.* Do not forget that, young as thou art, thou art accountable to God thy creator for thine actions and conduct, and sooner than thou art aware of may'st be called to give up thy account.

NOR is the *more steady* and *advanced* part of life without its vanity. When men are past the fever of youth, they usually change their thoughts and studies. But how do they change them? Most commonly it is a change of one vanity for another, of *vain pleasures* for *vain cares*.

*Conversis studiis ætas animusque virilis
Quærit opes.*—

Now perhaps they are intent upon heaping up riches, raising and aggrandising a family; establishing their interests, and procuring themselves fame, and power, and honour. And is not all this, as it is generally manag'd, as great vanity as youth is guilty of? When a man multiplies his wants, strives for things which will enlarge his cares and fears at present, and his account hereafter, minds these things too much to be able to mind better things to any purpose, and,

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† Eccles. xi. 9.

as the fruit of his victories and acquisitions, only plunges himself the deeper in slavery, there being no greater slave than the man whose wishes and desires grow with his possessions; what is all this better than vanity? When we say it is *not better*, we say the most favourable thing of it we can, for it is *really worse*: there being *vexation* added to the vanity of such a conduct, and *guilt* to that vexation. Men are the more inexcusable in this case, because they are come to a ripeness of judgment, as well as of years, and need not be the dupes and cullies of their own passions. The tide of youthful passions is retired, and now, if it be not their own fault, they may lay hold of the opportunity to restore reason to its sovereignty, and to settle the course of their actions, not only by the directions of *moral*, but of *christian* and *divine* prudence. This, if they do not, but suffer the passions of youth to be turned into others which are no less unreasonable, and many times more base and sordid, they are not more unhappy than they are criminal. The man of business condemns and rallies the slothful youth given up to his ease and pleasures; not considering there are *opposite* errors, and that while he avoids one extream he falls into another every whit as dangerous. He who bounds his views and moderates his desires, and while he employs his thoughts about this and that worldly object, suffers not his heart to be in-

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gaged by it, and the more he knows and gets of the world, despises it the more; he, and he alone, is exempted from that charge of vanity which is but too justly laid against others, *who in their best estate*, when the understanding has attained to its greatest strength and maturity, may be said to be *altogether vanity*.

FINALLY, is *old age* always *free* from that vanity which besets the other parts of life? One would be ready to think it should, after having laid up such a stock of experience, or had opportunity to do it, and as it were, outlived the follies of childhood, youth, and manhood. But, alas! the old man too, as ill as he can bear to be told so, is too often vain in his way. He has not the vanity of youth, but the vanity of his manly years increases upon him.

Quærit, & inventis miser abstinet, ac timet uti.

He knows no end in getting, yet hath not the heart to use what he has gotten; and is more covetous as he hath less reason to be so, being within a few steps of that world, where riches profit not, and cannot follow him if they did.

There is an evil, saith Solomon, which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: a man to whom GOD hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul, (i. e. for his life,) of all that he desireth: yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it. This is vanity

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and an evil disease. *This man cometh in with vanity, and though he live many years, departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Yea, though it were possible for him to live a thousand years twice told, yet has he seen no good.* For what good is there in that which a man does not use and enjoy? This is a vanity with which, generally speaking, none are so chargeable as old persons, and which is strange without seeing it. And as old persons are too apt to love *the things* of life immoderately, so *life itself*, when they have just done with it, and are past the capacity of enjoying it. To which we might add, the vanity of *groundless fears, tenaciousness* in respect of opinions long since taken up, no matter whether with reason or without, praising former times right or wrong, and running down the present; at which *Solomon* seems to glance, when he gives this advice, "*Say not thou what is the cause that the former days were better than these, for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.*" But I shall think it enough just to hint at these things, that I may not be thought to reproach old age. As there are some things respectable in old age, I may say many in the old age of one who has lived usefully and holily; so what I have mentioned of the vanity of old age, is only to signify from whence the danger and temptations in this part of life arise, that they who are arrived at old age, may consider

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sider that there is some care necessary for them as well as others, and that they who are in the way to it may so behave during the more active part of their lives, that if they should see many years, they may by their example be useful to the world, and be like those liquors which run fine and clear to the last. A vain young and middle-aged man makes a vain old one; whereas, *"the boary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness."* And the fewer the examples of this kind, the greater is the glory of those few. Thus does it appear that human life is *vain* from a short view of the several *stages* of it.

3. ANOTHER argument and example to prove that life is vain is, the great *variableness* of every man's state and condition. Man is liable to change, and so is the whole world about him. Life is filled up with a succession of unforeseen events, some prosperous, others afflictive; nor is it often long together, that the sky is without all clouds. The occasions of joy and sorrow, of hope and fear, do not only follow one the other very quick, so that a fit of laughter ends in a sigh, but are many times blended together like rain and sunshine in an *April* day, insomuch that the soul is divided betwixt contrary passions, and cannot give itself to any one. Indeed, our joys are seldom pure and sincere, our sweetest cup has

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some bitter ingredient. Or, put the case our circumstances are just as we would have them; how long do they continue so, without the loss of any one good thing we enjoyed, or the addition of any evil? Our very gains may prove the occasion of our losses, and that which is matter of rejoicing to day, lay a foundation for grief to morrow. The consequence of every new accession to our fortune, or to the number of our acquaintance, our friends and relatives, is, that there is something new added in which we lie open to the strokes of adversity. We are afflicted with the loss of a friend, because we before took a pleasure in having acquired him. And thus we cannot reasonably expect that the stream should always run in the same channel, or that things should keep at the same stay. And the more our enjoyments are, we must of course be subject to the more changes. Could our prosperity be fixed, it would be little worth, even tho' it were as compleat as a worldly mind can wish: but as it is at present, inconstant as the winds, and fading as the colours in the rain-bow, one would think no persons should set much by it, or once make a question whether *life* be *vain*, when the best *enjoyments* of it are so exceeding precarious and uncertain: *Man being in honour abideth not.* * *Wouldst thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make*

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make themselves wings, and fly away as an eagle towards heaven. Those things which the greater part of the world reckon the *greatest*, too many the *only realities*, the Wiseman stiles things which *are not* ; they are so inconstant and mutable as not to be worth reckoning upon ; they are not truly *thine*, unless thou canst call an eagle thine, which pitches in thy field, and the moment after takes his flight among the clouds. *Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* It is much if it be free from all changes, and thou dost not hear of something or other which thou wouldst rather should not have happened. And sometimes the changes are as *great* as they are *sudden* and *unexpected*. But why do I talk of great changes, when there is no need of these to discompose and ruffle that soul, whose passions are too easily and too often moved and put in a flutter by the least ?

4. LIFE cannot but be vain, because it is so *fleeting* and *uncertain* ; life itself, as well as the things of life. The years of man's life make so inconsiderable a number, that *Solomon*, in the text, judges it more proper to count by *days* ; *all the days of his vain life*. Were there as many *years* in life as there are *days*, life would make some figure ; but then, if it would be *less vain* in that respect, it would be *more miserable*. For who, that is wise, would

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† Prov. xxvii. 1.

would desire to have his existence in this state of sin and imperfection drawn out to such a length? But, alas! our years four times told very seldom equal the days that are in one year. To express this transitoriness of human life, *Job* draws his comparisons from three of the four elements, *the land, the water, and the air*, in the space of two verses, ^a *My days are swifter than a post, they flee away and see no good. They are past away as the swift ships, as the eagle that hasteth to his prey.* *Solomon* intends the same thing, when he saith of man, *that he spendeth his days as a shadow.* By this metaphor, he would put us in mind both of the *changeableness* and *brevity* of human life. A shadow is never long the same, being now of one length, now of another, and now nothing all: not to mention that there was nothing real in it while it seemed to be. ^a *He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down, he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.* ^b *My days are like a shadow when it declineth, and I am withered like grass. But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever, and thy remembrance to all generations.* What is man when compared with God? an empty shadow which vanishes away with the rock of ages. And does a shadow leave any print when it is gone? Herein like the shadow, or an arrow that cuts the air, or a vessel the water, is *man*. He passeth away and his place is no more

^a *Job* ix. 25. ^a *Job* xiv. 2. ^b *Psal.* cii. 11, 12.

more found. It is true, the monuments which some few leave behind them, show that they once lived; but generally to little purpose, being monuments of their folly, or, at best, of their skill and diligence imployed in things of small use to posterity, and none at all to themselves. Let us add, life is not only of short, but *uncertain* duration, which makes it still more vain. Death surprizes us in the midst of our designs and prospects, those that are innocent, laudable and beneficial, as well as those which are hurtful: then when with a great deal of difficulty, and after many fruitless essays, we have brought things to the point we laboured for, and made preparations for a life of usefulness to others, or the quiet enjoyment and improvement of ourselves.

“ Who can forbear exclaiming (saith the * writer of a great and an ingenious man’s life, who, against his inclination, had been ingaged in a life of public business; and when at last he was got into the situation he long wished for, an agreeable retreat, died soon after) “ who, saith he, can for-
 “ bear exclaiming on the weak hopes and
 “ frail condition of human nature? For as
 “ long as our friend was pursuing the course
 “ of ambition in active life, which he scarce
 “ esteemed his true life, he never wanted a
 “ constant health and strength of body, but

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“ as

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“ as soon as he had found an opportunity of
 “ beginning indeed to live, and enjoy himself
 “ in secret, his contentment was first broken
 “ by sickness, and at last his death was oc-
 “ casioned by his very delight in the country
 “ and the fields, which he had long fancied
 “ above all other pleasures.” Let us remem-
 ber this part of the vanity of human life, and
 not barely lament it, but as well as we can
 provide against it. Thus you see the vanity
 of life *absolutely* considered. The thing would
 have been yet more apparent if we took a
 comparative view of it, or considered it as
 compared with the life of man in the state of
innocence; with the life which we may rea-
 sonably suppose the descendants of the first
 man would have led, if *sin* had not entered
 the world; with the *dignity of human na-*
ture; and with that *state of perfection and*
happiness to which the children of God shall
 be advanced at the *consummation of all things*.
 But leaving this for another discourse, I chuse
 to conclude the present with two or three
 practical reflections.

I, LET us learn to set less by this vain life.
 The more vain it is, the more indifferent in
 all reason should we be to it. Why so fond,
 O my soul, of a life which so little deserves
 thy affection and esteem? Art thou not here
 incompassed with vanity, and wouldst thou
 always be confined within this tiresome circle?
 It is natural for the soul of man to tend to a
 more

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more perfect state: all mankind do this, tho' the greater part without knowing, or at least without observing it. To this purpose is that of the apostle, *° The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him that subjected the same; in hope that the creature itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.* The creature here meant is the *reasonable* creature, or the race of mankind, who being shaken from their true center, or rather having been never fixed on it, have no rest, no satisfaction. They are immediately conscious that something, the main thing, is wanting. They seek perfection and happiness; and forasmuch as this perfection and happiness are no where attainable but in the world to come, the scene for what is here called *the manifestation of the sons of God*, they do, as it were, wait for that state, but then it is only in an implicit and confused manner. The object to which the greater part of mankind do expressly and distinctly direct their desires and aims, is the present world. This life, vain as it is, engages all their attention. It takes up their *whole attention*, but cannot satisfy the *least part* of their *expectations*. And why then will they not inquire whether they are not got

; Rom. viii. 19—21.

into

into a wrong way? Why will they fix their choice where *they themselves* can have no *fixedness*? Is any thing in this life, is life itself to be prized at this rate? A thousand things put us in mind, that this is not our rest, that we might be the sooner brought to this resolution; *come, let us arise and go hence*. Life is the gift of God, therefore not to be despised, and so is every thing we enjoy in this life; but that we might not be unwilling to resign these gifts when demanded from us, nor over-value them while we have them, they have in them a mixture of *vanity*. Let us consider this, and we shall know how to form a right estimate of life, *thankful* for it, but not *wedded* to it. We shall know how to distinguish between the *gift* and the *vanity* which accompanies it; taking care that we do not fall in love with vanity, and considering that whatever this life has which is not vain lies in a small compass, and is infinitely exceeded by the happiness of the future state. Which minds me of another inference.

2. SINCE this life is vain, let us be thankful for the discovery which God has made us of another life, *as perfect* as this is *vain*. The greater the vanity of this present visible scene, with the greater gratitude to God, and pleasure and satisfaction of mind, should I think that this is not the *only* scene of things. Reason gives us some obscure perceptions of a better state than this; the *gospel revelation* sets it in the

SER. I. *Of the Vanity of human Life.* 27

the clearest and the fullest light. How is it then that this discovery is so coldly entertained by us? Why are we no more affected with the view of these glorious objects, and with the consideration of that boundless goodness which has ^d *prepared such things for them who love God, as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and cannot enter into the heart of man to conceive?* Do we believe the account given of these things in the gospel? have we duly consider'd it? and yet are not our hearts moved and engaged by it? Do we see no reason to ^e *bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begotten us to a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us;* no reason to prefer this glorious inheritance to the possessions of this world, and to rejoice in the belief and hope of it? It can never be. Let us say what we will, if this be the case, we have little faith or hope, we do not rightly understand wherein the happiness of heaven consists, or do not allow ourselves to consider it. For did we consider this as often and seriously as we should, whatever the disposition and relish of our minds might be at first; the frequent contemplation of a future state, so utterly unlike and infinitely surpassing this, would quickly work a change in us, turn the inclinations of the soul about to

^d 1 Cor. ii. 9.

^e 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

to the right point, and oblige it to cry out in the language of the *Psalmist*,^f *O when shall I come and appear before God!* And let me add, with our *desires* of this blessed state; our *hope* of it would proportionably increase, the fervour of our desires being one of the best grounds of hope: and as our desires were more inflamed, and our hopes more raised, we should abound more in thankfulness to God for this inestimable gift.

SOME other reflections I shall leave to be pursued when I have considered the *comparative* vanity of life, which I shall do in the next discourse.

^f *Psal.* xlii. 2.



S E R-



S E R M O N II.

Of the vanity of human LIFE, appearing in a *comparative* view of it.

ECCLES. vi. 12.

Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?

I HAVE observed the following things in these words as deserving a distinct consideration.

I. THE account which the Wiseman gives us of the *present life*. It is a *vain* life, and *spent* as a *shadow*.

II. AN inquiry natural enough for all to make, and *rightly* managed, very *necessary* and *useful*, viz. *What is good for man in this life?*

III. THE ignorance of man in this important point. *Who knoweth?* i. e. *no man knoweth*.

I. THE

I. THE account which the Wiseman gives us of the present life ; it is a *vain life*, &c. This I have in part considered ; and represented the vanity of life in an *absolute* view. To make it more apparent, I shall now give you a view of it as compared with the life of man in his *state of innocence* ; with the life which, we may reasonably suppose, the descendants of the first man would have led, if sin had not entered the world ; with the *dignity of human nature* ; and with that *state of perfection and happiness* to which the children of God shall be advanced at the *consummation of all things*.

I. How vain is this life compared with the life of man in his *state of innocence* ! Life was then filled with pleasures, and among those pleasures there was a perfect subordination of the pleasures of the *body* to those of the *mind* ; of the pleasures which the *creation* afforded him, to the pleasure he took in the contemplation and love of the *Creator*. Paradise was the abode of pleasure, and of nothing but pleasure, as long as it continued to be the abode of innocence. Every object was pleasing, every sense was entertained without danger, without guilt, and without any after uneasiness and disgust. God had endowed his new creature with wisdom to use the good which was before him, not turning it into evil by abuse. That he knew
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the nature of the several animals which stocked the garden of *Eden*, appeared by the* *names* which he gave them; and he had the same exact knowledge of the qualities of other things; for what ends they were designed and how they ought to be applied to answer these ends. Nor did man ever go beyond the limits set him by his Creator, till he eat of the forbidden fruit. And had he always kept within these limits, as he might easily have done, he would have been happy; as happy as it was fit and possible he should be in a state of trial. For when first put together, the body and the soul were more suitably matched than now, and received much more pleasure and satisfaction from their union with one another. The meaner part was under the government of the nobler, so as not to disturb and pervert it in any of its operations by the fallies of the sensual appetites, or of the passions and imagination. The tranquility arising from the exact temperament of the body and its perfect health, was worth all our pleasures. It was not till after the fall that man was condemned to *eat bread in the sweat of his brow*. Before he could have said --- *labor ipse voluptas* --- his labours and his recreations were the same. Every action was easy and pleasant, and no action misemployed. Life was spent usefully, and with honour, not in vain amusements, or in
toil

* Gen. ii. 19.

* Gen. iii. 19.

toil and anxiety. His understanding did not dwell on the *surface* of things, nor his affections *rest* in earthly objects. He made the more of the creation, both as an object of *contemplation* and *enjoyment*, because he did not make too much of it; not placing it in the room of God, to *whom alone* he subjected himself, not to any of his creatures, seeking his happiness in the first and most excellent of all beings, and delighting above all to converse with him in the exercises of holy meditation and divine love. The senses could furnish him with no pleasures he valued like those of the mind; as of all the pleasures of the mind, there were none comparable to those of devotion. In this state, what room was there for vanity? None at all till sin introduced it. Indeed, if innocent man might have *died* and *perished* after all this, if he might have past out of such a happy state into a state of forgetfulness and insensibility, his *condition* would have been *vain*, because *transient*.^b But *Adam* would never have known death, if he had not known sin, much less would he have been liable to any utter extinction of his being. He might have been advanced to higher states, and to a nobler life; and very probably would have been advanced, but would never have been degraded. And is there any resemblance between this life of man in a state of innocence, and

^b Gen. ii. 17. Rom. v. 12.

and the present vain life? would one think it was the life of the same creature?

2. LET us compare this vain life with that which the descendants of the first man would probably have enjoyed, if *sin* had never entered the world. There would, it is certain, have been this difference between our first parents and their posterity, that whereas they were created in their full strength of body and mind, their children would have been born in a state of weakness, and by slow degrees have reached the vigour and perfection of life. And this may be accounted a sort of *vanity*, which would have cleaved to the life of these innocent creatures, arising from the *manner* of their coming into being. But then let us only consider the exceeding care and prudence with which parents would have managed the education of their children, the sound and healthful constitution which every one would have brought into the world; every sense and member being exactly framed and proportioned, the humours most harmoniously mixed and tempered, and the whole piece composed and put out of hand with the most finished skill: the result of which must be a regularity in the affections and passions, and a clearness and facility in the functions of the soul, of which we know very little from our own experience. Let

us farther add the vigilant eye and guardian hand of providence, observing and keeping off all evil, and the constant and familiar intercourse we may conceive would then have taken place between God and man, and his Spirit perpetually influencing theirs: let us, I say, consider these things, and we shall see reason to acquit the infant and childish years of *such* a life from a great deal of that vanity to which *we* are exposed. And then when these innocent creatures were grown up to the use of their reasonable powers, how, think we, they would have employed them? how have spent their time, and wherein have placed their chief happiness? The difference between *their* passions and *ours*, being like that between wild beasts and tame; reason in them would have *led* passion, not have been led *captive* by it; and the light of reason would have been rendered more certain and efficacious for the government of the passions, by the illuminations and influences of a higher principle. They would not have left it to an irregular and changing fancy to chuse their pleasures or employments; but would have considered by what course of actions they should glorify their Maker most, and most benefit mankind. Religion would have had the forming of all their schemes and designs, life would have been directed to the noblest ends,

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ends, and conducted by the wisest rules and measures; so that they would never have mis'd their *main* end, and seldom the *particular* and *subordinate* ends at which they aimed. They would not have wandered up and down in life, hardly knowing who and what they were, and what they had to do; now following this whim, now that, or always wrong; of which they who observe what passes in the world may now see frequent instances. From the right exercise of their faculties, and improvement of their time, from a bright and raised understanding, a clear and quiet conscience, well-ordered affections, an useful and pious life, from health of body, a prosperous state of soul, mutual endearments of friendship, the delightful exchange of kind offices, from enquiries into nature, observations on the history of providence, the tokens of God's presence, the assurance of his love, the prospects of future glory; from these, and other like employments, they would have received a thousand pleasures, intellectual, moral, and divine. All would have been peace and satisfaction, and their days have stolen away unperceived, till the time came for them to exchange, not a mortal for an immortal state, but earth for heaven, and a state of trial, for one of everlasting recompences. Imperfection there would have been in *such* a state, as there

must always be in a state of trial,) but nothing that could be properly accounted *vanity*, much less such vanity as that to which we are now *sold*. For that the vanity of the present state would not have been, if men had not sinned is plain, from these words of the apostle; ¹ *The creature*, (that is, the reasonable creature, mankind, as appears from the context,) *was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who subjected the same*. So that we were not subject to vanity, till *Adam*, by his transgression, or God, as a punishment of this transgression, subjected us to it. Which seems to imply, that had our first parents preserved their integrity, and transmitted the human nature sound and pure to their posterity, and had they kept it pure, we should not have had the same ground to accuse life of *vanity* which we now have. The *labours* of life would not have been vain as they now are, nor the several *stages* of it; probably there would have been *no* such thing as *old age*, meaning thereby a *decay* and *weakness* of the faculties of body and mind; in this sense they would have been always young, or would not have known when the time was come for their translation out of this world, by the sinking of nature, but only by the number of years. There would
not

¹ Rom. viii. 20.

not have been such a fluctuation of events, such a shifting of the scenes. The very *elements* and seasons would have been more kindly and favourable, and after a flow of many happy years, an end would have been put to life upon this earth, not by the stroke of death, but by an easy exchange of one world for another, a state less perfect for one more so. It was, perhaps, with a view to the vanity which the fall had introduced into things, of which by this time our first parents, (the woman especially,) were admonished by their own sad experience, that *Eve* names her second son * *Abel*, that is, *vanity*, to signify it was a vain world he was born into, of which she might not be so sensible at the birth of her *eldest* son, in whom she seems to have been very much disappointed. And as the mighty expectations which the mother had concerning *Cain* her eldest son were vain; so *Abel*, her second, proved a most affecting instance of the vanity of life in this, that notwithstanding the innocency of his profession, and his own inoffensive and upright behaviour, he fell an untimely sacrifice to the envy of his brother. The good man is oppressed and dieth childless, his brother lives to be the founder of arts and cities, and multiplies into a numerous posterity. These were early examples

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of

* Gen. iv. 2.

of the melancholly change in the state of man after the fall.

3. IF we compare life in its present state with the *dignity* of the *human nature*, how exceeding vain will it appear? The nature of man is the same as it ever was, or would have been in the golden age of innocence, the *same* as to its *faculties* and *capacities*, tho' not as to the *soundness* of those faculties, and the improvement of those capacities. The worth and dignity of the human nature is to be estimated from its most valuable part, the soul; the disproportion between which and the body, the other part of man, is greater than in numbers between many millions and a single unit. What is most considerable as to the body, is borrowed all from its union with the soul. Let us then briefly survey some of the chief capacities and attributes of the human soul, which will serve to set the vanity of the present life in the fullest view; such as its *spirituality*, its *freedom*, its capacity for *knowledge*, its capacity for *virtue* and *holiness*, its capacity for *happiness*, and, finally, its *immortality*.

I. THE soul of man is a *spiritual* being, of a nature intirely distinct from all corporeal substances, cannot become an object of sense, and is utterly unlike all those things which are so; is not made up of all, or either of the four elements; is finer than æther,
more

more active than light, more indivisible than the least point of matter we can imagine, and hath a power of thought and self-motion which matter can never be endowed with. Let matter pass through all the changes, and put on all the shapes or appearances of which it is capable, *thought* and *self-motion* will not be among them. Matter may be *moved*, but can never *move itself*. The *principle* of this motion must be always contained in some other being, which at the same time that it determines itself, can move matter too. Matter may appear in different dresses, be greater or smaller, in this place or that, and have various qualities, but can never *think*. Thought is the peculiar privilege of immaterial substances. And when this spirit, forgetting its superior dignity, doats upon the material world, fancies charms in gold and silver, is beyond measure pleased with a piece of earth that shines and glitters to the eye, and mistakes those for the most real things, and of the greatest importance which, as to bodies themselves, are only so many powers resulting from the various combinations of the parts of matter, by which they are fitted to excite different and contrary sensations in the soul; when the thinking being is so little acquainted with its own worth, as to debase itself below that which has no thought, and

never can have any, acting as if made for these things; and not only linked to them by the body, but in nature one with them, and entirely dependant upon them; when we see such absurdities as these, can we forbear crying out that *life is vain*? for what do we see but spirits *lost* amongst matter? souls ignorant of their own nature and value, and attributing imaginary excellencies, to objects which are altogether foreign to them? Such a confusion of things do we behold in this life.

2. THE soul is a *free* principle; dependant, it is true, upon the body, and upon the world in many respects; but independant in this, that it is not necessitated to judge or act by any bodily impulses. Let things appear how they may to the senses, the soul can suspend its opinion and judgment, till it has examined and considered them more thoroughly. Let the appetites and inclinations of the body urge and shake it never so strongly, it can refuse their solicitations, and forbear acting, till it has maturely considered what the consequences will be. Let the world, by the allurements of sensible objects and enjoyments, or the secret influence of custom and example, try to corrupt the integrity of the soul, and to lead it astray from the paths of virtue, unless the soul freely consents, the world can do nothing.

And

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And shall this *free-born* soul sell itself into slavery for a thing of nought? drudge for what cannot be of any *real* use to it; for what instead of enobling and enriching it, will but debase and impoverish it? be imposed upon by false opinions, and led, as an ox to the slaughter, by blind inclinations, and violent passions? What an instance of vanity is here! if that be not too soft a name for it.

3. THE soul has a vast capacity for *knowledge*. We have some few examples of it before us; men of elevated understandings, and of largeness of heart, *as the sand on the sea-shore*. Such a one was *Solomon*, who had wisdom as *an angel of God*; and such, if God so pleased, might any other person become. And is it not a mortifying thought, that souls so capacious, in whom such amazing treasures of wisdom and knowledge might be lodged, should not be in a condition to improve this their capacity? should, as to the greater part of them, be necessarily taken up with ideas and thoughts, which, instead of raising and enlarging the mind, sink and narrow it, and have no relation but to this present transitory state? How little does the wisest man know, compared with what he is ignorant of, yet capable of knowing? and how far short do the most ignorant fall of the most knowing? they
who

who from morning to night labour for a livelihood, and with all their labour can get little more than is barely sufficient to support them; of those who enjoy a concurrence of inclination, genius, and ability for the pursuits of knowledge? Let us suppose a man in such a state that his soul is not obliged to attend the cravings of the body, who has time wholly to employ in the search of truth, every help and advantage which can be desired to succeed in this search, and a proper turn and strength of mind for it; what advances would this man make in the knowledge of God, of nature, of providence, of himself, of the world about him, of the sublimest speculations, and the most useful inventions and discoveries? When we think of this, and then reflect upon the present condition of mankind; how the soul is here bowed down under the weight of a sluggish body, has a multitude of avocations which divert its time and strength, is prepossessed with vulgar prejudices, and travels in a mist; how often it embraces error for truth, and mistakes probability for certainty, and is commonly most positive when it is most blind; we must own that life is *vain*, unless we are among those stupid benighted souls who have no notion of other objects besides those which are before them, nor any relish for the acquisitions and entertainments of the mind.

mind. Farther, it makes this *vanity* the more lamentable, that of the little knowledge we have, the greatest part lies not in things of use and importance, with which certainly we ought to begin. We have *little knowledge, and less wisdom*. For *wisdom* is the knowledge of making the *utmost advantage* of the circumstances in which God hath placed us, whatever they be ; the knowledge of the *best ends* we can propose to ourselves, and of the *best means* for the accomplishment of these ends. This wisdom, which is of much greater worth than all other knowledge without it, we have all opportunities of attaining in some degree, but opportunities which very few of us (so vain, alas, are we !) are careful to lay hold of, and improve as we ought ; the consequence of which is, that we are fools in the matters of our souls, and in every part of our conduct betray our folly ; how sagacious and quick-sighted soever we may be esteemed, and really be, in things of a speculative nature, and of little moment.

4. THE soul has a *capacity* for those *degrees* of *virtue* and *holiness*, which are never reached by it in the present life. Knowledge, even of the best things, is only the flower and blossom of the tree, but virtue is the fruit ; and, alas, how seldom does this fruit grow to any ripeness and perfection in the present

present life ! In most of those, who bring forth the fruits of righteousness, these fruits are poor and starveling, while the generality are like the *barren fig-tree*, which had nothing on it but leaves. Was not man created upright and holy ? is not holiness the true perfection of his nature, the stamp and image of the Divinity upon him ? the most beautiful ray from the fountain of light ? Nothing can be more evident. Hath man, together with this his perfection, lost the *capacity* of it too, so as to be without all hope of being restored to it again ? thanks be to God he has not : the grace of God can repair his broken image, and, with its divine pencil, recall the vanished features, and does it in part, and with regard to some few. But after all, this is not a world for holiness and righteousness to thrive and flourish in, we are not properly situated for any great acquisitions ; a thousand things conspire to retard our progress towards the summit of perfection. We have not that clear and full view of the beauty and excellence of holiness, which is necessary to fasten our hearts to it, and to make us follow holiness with all the force and application of our natures ; neither is the view we have of it steady and constant, being interrupted by a croud of objects which thrust themselves upon us. Our apprehensions of things spiritual

ritual and divine are obscure and cloudy, our resolutions weak, our passions strong, the difficulties and discouragements we meet with many, and the opposition great; all which things have so unhappy an effect as to the most, that they will not try what they can do; they throw aside all regard to virtue and religion, or satisfy themselves with the name and appearance of it, or only endeavour to excel in some outside qualities and accomplishments, which will give them a figure in the eye of the world, and recommend to the esteem of the unthinking many; and so the shadow serves them instead of the substance all the days of their vain life, in which they converse only among clouds and delusions. Thro' the vanity and imperfection of the present state, their capacity for spiritual and divine attainments cannot, at best, unfold to any remarkable degree; and instead of rising to this degree, the generality are so vain as to be satisfied with a meer *name to live*.

5. THE *capacity* which the soul has for *happiness* is never half filled in this vain life. Did I say, half filled? I should rather have said, as I truly might, that the least corner of the heart's void is scarcely replenished. We are acquainted in this world with little more than the name of happiness, or, at best, the idea and notion of it, and this exceeding

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ceeding defective. The happiness of a single soul bespeaks something more deep and boundless than the wide ocean. God alone can fill and satisfy this soul. He *can* do it, but *does it not* in this life, *concealing* himself as it were behind the curtain of *visible* objects, and spreading before our eyes scenes of worldly bliss, in order to *try* us how we will make our choice; whether we will hearken to the dictates of enlightened reason, and by faith and hope seek our happiness in an invisible God, and an unseen world; or look no farther than the present scene, taking up our rest in created good, or, if that cannot be, yet seeking it there. And what is the course taken by the greatest numbers? vain and foolish. Happiness is the thing they want, and what is the method which they use to find it? Ought they not to sit down and seriously consider the *characters* of that happiness for which man is made, in what sort of enjoyments this happiness might consist, the quantity of good he must have before he can say he has enough, the temper of mind which must qualify him for the enjoyment of his proper good, and the way in which he may make sure of it? Should not all these things be considered in the enquiry after happiness? But are they considered? Surely then men would not leave the *fountain* for the cistern; fix upon a happiness which
does

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does not *suit* them, of which they cannot make *sure*, and of which when they have *most*, they have but a *scanty* measure, not enough by a thousand times to equal the wide-stretched capacities of a reasonable soul, which, after it has wearied itself in this world of vanities, will say, if it be wise, *I will now return to my resting place.* ¹ *Whom have I in heaven but thee, O Lord, and what is there upon earth that I can desire besides thee? If I enjoy any happiness upon earth, it is all from thee. Not in this or that created comfort, not in all together separate from God; nor if I ascended to heaven, should I find my happiness, if I did not find my God there.*

6. THE soul is *immortal*; had a beginning of time, but shall have no end of days. It is not in the figure of our bodies, or any advantages of their composition, that our chief preheminance lies. How differently soever moulded and fashioned, the body of man is no more than flesh, and blood, and bones, like that of other animals, and at present not much more durable than theirs. If we would prove our *preheminance* above other creatures, we must look higher, and rate our worth by the gifts of *reason* and *immortality*. These are alone the possessions of the human soul; and it must be confessed, that

¹ Psal. lxxiii. 25.

that *immortality*, where other things are answerable (as it is our own fault if they are not here) is a glorious privilege, a distinction worthy to be prized and valued. In all the visible creation, what is there comes near the soul in this respect? Flowers and plants soon wither; trees have a longer date, some of them a century or two, but at last decay; animal bodies wear out; the proudest works of human art fall into ruins; the earth, after having supplied many generations of plants and living creatures, shall itself come to an end; the elementary ^m *heavens wear old as doth a garment*; and perhaps the sun, and other starry lamps, be at last, tho' not till after a long course of ages, burnt out, and others kindled in their room: but the *soul* will *never* be *old*, *never* decay, *never* die. Let us now consider the present lot of this immortal soul united to a dying body, and having its abode in a dying world; where time and death are continually enlarging their conquests: yet is the soul fond of this mortal body, and attached to the objects of this perishing world, and unmindful of its own immortality, and regardless of objects that are immortal like itself, falls in love with things temporary, and is tempted to confine its cares and affections to these; yea, is not only *tempted* to do this, but
too

too often complies with the temptation. O vanity and folly beyond all parallel! A soul designed for immortality, capable of immortal happiness and glory, and of extending its views beyond all the bounds of time, *forgets* its *everlasting* duration, *thinks* not of its relation to the *eternal* God, turns its back upon the glorious objects of eternity which court it, and becomes enamoured of the fading beauties and enjoyments of time! and thus suffers itself to be fool'd and abused, till it has *for ever lost* immortal happiness, though not its immortal being? This renders the vanity so great, and so deplorable, as to be incapable of any aggravation beyond its real greatness. I have now done with the third view, in which the vanity of life is conspicuous, *viz.* when *compared* with the *dignity* of *human nature*.

4. WE shall never be so sensible of the *vanity* of the present life, as when we have *compared* it with that *state* of *perfection* and *happiness*, to which the *children* of God shall be *advanced* after death, and at the period and consummation of the world; provided we are thoroughly possessed with the belief of such a state. In this world *all is vanity*, in the next world there is *no* such thing as *vanity*. Here all things bear the marks of the vanity and sinfulness of *man*; there of the wisdom, the immutability, and

50 *Of the Vanity of human Life. VOL. II.*
perfection of God. The glory of this world is too light and vain to be a balance against the sufferings of it; all the ⁿ *sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.* Now we appear as the *sons of men*, and are therefore made subject to vanity; then will be *the manifestation of the sons of God.* Now we are in bondage to our corruptible and sinful nature; then we shall be *delivered into the most glorious liberty of the children of God.* Here we are exposed to a double vanity, a vanity of *mind*, and a vanity of *condition*; in the world to come there will be neither.

1. IN that world there is *no* such thing as a *vain mind*; for if there was a vain mind, there would be a mind miserable as far as vain: but misery is there unknown. That is the region of happiness, where happiness only, and such things as contribute to happiness, can have any admission. In a reasonable mind we cannot suppose vanity without sin; but only holiness and innocence can dwell where the ^o *spirits of just men* are, which being *made perfect*, are no longer liable to sin. It is the vanity of men's minds which is the cause of the chief part of the vanity of their lives. They have vain notions, and vain desires; one begets the other, and both produce

⁂ Rom. viii. 18.

⁂ Heb. xii. 23.

produce vain pursuits. Happy they in this respect, who are got within the boundaries of the invifible world ! they enjoy the moft *perfect* rectitude both of *judgment* and *inclination*. They are not liable to make a wrong judgment of their happinefs ; they cannot therefore chufe wrong, nor can they act wrong, not in a fingle inftance. Where there is nothing but light, there can be nothing but truth ; now their's is the land of light and vifion. There ^p *God himfelf is feen*, and in feeing God they behold that light which discovers both their own nature, and the nature of other things ; fo that they cannot poffibly be miftaken in thinking any thing to be a part of their happinefs which is not. They difcern what is fuitable to an intellectual nature as theirs is, and what is not fo ; the intimate knowledge they have of the Supreme Good, which is ever before them, is the beft rule by which to judge of inferior goods ; which deserve more or lefs regard, as they approach nearer, or are at a greater diftance from that Good which is all perfect : and with *truth of judgment*, there is *joined* a truth or rectitude of the *heart*. The heart defires that, and that only, which the judgment dictates to be good, and defires it with a degree of ardour fuitable to the degree of its goodness. There is never an inftance in that

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world,

^p Matt. v. 8.

world, of inclinations disobedient to reason. This proves there is no vanity of *mind* in that state, the mind being at once and for ever freed from vain notions, and from vain desires. Nor,

2. Is there any such thing in that perfect world as *vanity of condition*. No, every one's condition is as far from vanity, as he himself is. Vanity of condition is much the same with the vanity of objects. It is a vain scene which we are conversant with, and herein altogether unlike that which opens before the purified soul in the next life. All the objects of that world have the greatest *reality* in them ; they do not seem better than they are. No one needs to use that prayer of the Psalmist ; ^a *turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity* ; because there is no vanity to behold. They do not *walk in a vain show*, as here, neither are they at any time delighted or disquieted in vain. The glory of this world is false and counterfeit, mere tinsel and mockery ; that of the greatest men is so, and would be so acknowledged had they a sight of the glories of the upper world, ^r *that exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, or could but in any tolerable manner represent it to themselves. Here pleasure *flashes* upon the senses and *dies* ; there are
rivers

^a Psal. cxix. 37.

^r 2 Cor. iv. 17.

‘rivers of pleasure for evermore. Our wealth and treasures, compared with theirs above, are a less value than *counters* bear against *gold*. Were we to consider distinctly the several objects and enjoyments of the future state, we should be sensible from a view of every particular, much more of all together, that *vanity* can have *no place* there. The *highest* object there is *God*, the *lowest* is the *frame* and *order* of things without them, which we have reason to think, is as *grand*, *beauteous*, and *consummate*, as a world composed of matter can be. The supreme Being is infinitely removed from all imperfection; he has an incomprehensible fullness of being and excellency; he is *every* thing which is *good*, without any mixture of *evil*. This glorious Being is the principal object of the saints blessedness; we might almost venture to say, and not without reason, the *only* object, if we consider how small the share of happiness and pleasure is resulting from the enjoyment of other things, compared with that which the glorified soul finds in the fruition of *God*; and that the pleasure which other objects give, depends upon the connection they have with the chief Good: so that could the chief Good be supposed withdrawn, the soul, but now so happy, would be in a most disconsolate condition, notwithstanding

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f Psal. xvi. 11. Revel. xxii. 1.

all other things continued as they were before ; and in a moment, as it were, pass from *mid-day* to *mid-night*. However, as God has made us compound beings, and endowed us with various faculties, so in this future state he has provided a *variety* of objects for our entertainment ; a *variety* without *vanity*. There needs not this to encrease the variety. The society will be made up of saints and angels, among whom there is not one vain spirit to be found ; and consequently, in an assembly of such select and improved spirits, there can be no such thing as vain conversation. All their converses together, must turn upon things of solid worth. Their discoveries, their observations, their pursuits and employments, will be all *suitable* to the great *end* for which they were made, the glory of God in their supreme and everlasting felicity. So that there will be never a tempter to evil, and farther, no object to tempt ; not but every object will be delightful, much more delightful than those we are now acquainted with, but with this difference, that whereas the objects of this world *ensnare* at the same time that they delight, those of the next will delight without ensnaring. Far from leading the heart astray from God, they will serve as so many *mirrors*, in which we shall behold the power, and wisdom, and goodness of God reflected,

flected, and thus every moment exhibit God to our view, and engage our hearts in admiration and love of his infinite perfections. Such is that blessed state reserved for the faithful, not subject to vanity of any kind, but perfect and happy. This state begins immediately after death. Then the soul separated from the body, does with that put off all its vanity, its vain thoughts and imaginations, and its vain desires, and hopes, and fears. All these disperse at once like a mist, in which it had till then wandered, and now it beholds things in the light of everlasting truth. And as it has no vanity of its own to disturb it, so none in the state into which it passes. The soul which had conversed among *shadows*, now enters into a world of *realities*, where there is no false appearance, no evil lurking under a show of good, no enemy under the guise of a friend, no delusion, no disappointment, no abatement of happiness, no change in it. At the final period of things, the saints will receive their consummation in bliss; and accordingly we are referred to that as the time when *the sons of God will be fully manifested*. See Rom. viii. 19. compar'd with ver. 23. *The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. And not only they, but ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves,*

selves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. The body will be redeemed from vanity at the resurrection, as the soul is at death. As the body of the first man was taken from the dust of the ground, so will the bodies of the just be, but not formed and organized as that was. The body of *innocent* man was an *animal* body, subject to hunger, and thirst, and weariness ; the body of fallen man is a *corrupted* as well as an *animal* body, a source of innumerable temptations ; ^t the bodies of saints, after the resurrection, will be neither corrupt nor animal, *impassive, incorruptible, immortal.* The body will be perfect in its kind as well as the soul, and have an exact congruity to the soul which animates it. For we may suppose there is an original difference among spirits, some being *pure* spirits, others *cloathed* with matter ; and among those of the latter sort, the *vehicles* they are cloathed with may be of *different finenesses*, according to the different perfection of their intellectual powers. Consequently the human soul in that state of perfection shall have a body of the make which best suits it, as far removed from flesh and blood, as perhaps it will be from that covering of ætherial light which some of the angelic order may inhabit ; adapted to the nature of the human

faculties,

^t 1 Cor. xv. 42.

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faculties, and fitted for the exercise of all those operations in which the happiness of the soul consists : and of the happiness of the soul and body thus united, there will be no *interruption*, no *decay*, no *end*.

THE improvement we are to make of this view of the vanity of human life, is seriously to enquire how we ought to behave with regard to it ; what course, both in *duty* and *prudence*, we are concerned to take ? The answer is easy. We are contentedly to *submit* to that part of the vanity which *necessarily* ariseth from the present constitution of things ; and to seek a *remedy* against that which is to be *avoided*, by a wise conduct of ourselves.

I. LET us *contentedly submit* to the vanity of this life, as far as it necessarily ariseth from the present constitution of things. It may in a sense be said, that God himself has *subjected us to vanity*. He has placed us in this state of imperfection. It is his will that we should have but a sort of *twilight*, in which we may be subject to *mistake* objects, and to lose our way if we do not take a great deal of care ; that we should have a *liberty* of choice which we *may* abuse, and shall be under temptations to abuse ; that things should not yield all that pleasure which it is natural to wish they did, and which, therefore, without proper caution, we shall be apt to expect
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they will. That our bodies should be *frail* and *corruptible*, a clog and a hindrance to our minds, and, if we are not very watchful, a *snare* to them; that we should be *liable* to errors and temptations of various kinds, and be never free from endless changes: all this, and a great deal more being the result of our own frame, and of the frame of the world about us, is the will of God, and therefore not to be found fault with. The wise God knows best how to dispose of his creatures, in what state to place them *first* and *last*, and by what steps to conduct them to that happiness which is the end of their beings. He has his reasons for every act and dispensation of his providence towards us, drawn from his own perfections, and the most comprehensive view of things; so that what is vanity, as it regards us, is the direct contrary as it makes a part in the designs of God. Indeed were there not wise and valuable ends to be served by this state and course of things which now take place, the vanity of life would be a reflection upon the author of it: in that case, it would not only be vain in *one* view, and with *regard* to the *present* time, but upon the *whole*. Nay, it is farther probable, that if this life had no respect to another, in which it terminated, that question would not be without foun-

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foundation ; " *Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain ?* But as we ought not to think that God has made all men in vain, continuing a race of creatures one after another to no purpose that they themselves can discover ; which would be the case if there was no life beyond this, if the perpetual *motion* we are now in were not in order to *rest*, and this *imperfect* state were not to give place to one more *perfect* ; upon this very account we ought to conclude that this life is only preparatory to another ; that the present is a state of trial, and therefore a state in which we are liable to sin ; and because we have sinned, to suffer, that our own experience might help to cure us of our wrong judgments and evil inclinations, and that leaving those *cisterns*, which with a great deal of toil and very little advantage we had *been out to ourselves*, we might return to the *fountain* of being and blessedness, and there meet, after all our wanderings, with true repose and everlasting contentment and satisfaction. When we have considered the thing in this view, we shall be convinced, that we have no just cause to murmur or complain against the vanity of the present life, as far as it is the will and appointment of our wise Creator. But then,

2. LET

2 Psa, lxxxix. 47.

2. LET us seek a remedy against *so much* of the vanity of this life as may be *avoided* by a *wise* management of ourselves. And let me say, the *greater* part of the vanity is of this kind; it is *our own creature, and nourished by ourselves*. There are many things which *increase vanity*, against which therefore it concerns us to be *watchful*, as well as to *employ* those *means* which have a *contrary* influence.

1. LET us watch against those things which *increase the vanity* of life, making a vain life much *more* vain than it would otherwise be. Such as these; *not judging for ourselves*, but *implicitly* following the prevailing opinions, tho' erroneous, of the world: or if we judge for ourselves, yet *not framing* our judgments according to the *light* of our *understandings*, but by looking at things thro' the wrong *medium* of *fancy* and *passion*. And, finally, living as if there was no life after this.

1. ONE thing that *increases* the vanity of life, making a vain life much *more* vain than it would otherwise be, is mens *not judging for themselves*, but *blindly* and *implicitly* following the *prevailing*, tho' erroneous opinions of the world. Most people are for being in the *mode*, as to the sentiments of their minds as well as their external dress; the consequence of which is, that folly be-
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ing in all ages the reigning fashion, they had rather play the fool with the greatest numbers, than be singularly wise. The majority will always assume a right to impose *names* upon things; very few are willing to dispute this right, and for that reason very few will take upon them to examine and judge, whether things are *rightly* named: whether that be true wisdom, real nobility, solid happiness, which the world so calls: whether the notions the world has of what is good, excellent, honourable, lovely, and beautiful, be *right* or *wrong*: as if whatever opinion was established, must needs be right, or they were not to blame for coming into it tho' it was wrong. Let us, my friends, resolve that we will not follow a multitude in a matter of this consequence; that we will make the *best enquiry* we can about the way to happiness, use that reason which God has given us, and gladly accept all the assistance we may have from those who show themselves to be the disciples of heavenly wisdom; and, above all, from the infallible oracles of wisdom contained in the word of God. We should then quickly perceive, that the notions which the bulk of mankind have of the things of this life were more vain than the things themselves; having the knowledge of God and of ourselves, we should know the world better than they do

do who are the children of the world. These may be better skilled in the arts of gaining the world; but we should be better judges of the value of it, and better able to tell the right use of it. This would be the effect of judging for ourselves, instead of following prevailing errors, we should thereby prevent that vanity which proceeds from false opinions of things. Unless,

2. THO' we judged for ourselves, yet we frame *not* our judgments according to the *light* of our *understandings*, but look at things thro' the *deceitful medium* of *fancy* and *passion*. It is to little purpose if we depose the *public* fancy, if we set up a *private* one in the room, a thing too often done. Some persons will not join in the popular cry, they will not let others chuse their way for them, and give them laws and rules for thinking. They scorn such a mean and abject submission to other mens notions; but while they scorn being led by the fancies and passions of *other* men, are they equally careful not to be led astray by their *own*? It were well if they were. They would then save themselves a great deal of trouble, and not find themselves haunted with those vain fears and jealousies, or filled with those vain hopes, or delighted with those vain amusements, which now besiege them: they would judge more *soundly*, think more *soberly*, tread more *warily*,

warily, and in every thing relating to this life manage more *moderately*, than they are used to do; and by this means they would have fewer disappointments, fewer and lighter afflictions, and more sincere joy and tranquility.

3. ANOTHER thing which makes this vain life still *more* vain is, mens *living as if there was no other life* besides this. This every wicked man, every man void of the power of religion, does. And have we not reason to think that this character comprehends the greatest numbers? Do not the multitude go in the *broad* way? in the paths of vice and irreligion? Do they not live estranged from God, without any regard to his will, any value for his favour, any concern for his honour? Does not the corrupt principle rule in their hearts, and conduct the course of their lives? Now *sin* will be always *linked* with *vanity*; a sensual worldly ungodly life will ever be a vain life, yea worse than vain. There will be no end of such mens complaints, tho' their complaints will be more unjust than those of any men, because the vanity they complain of is mostly owing to their own ill conduct. While they are wandring from God, can they expect to meet with any thing else but vanity? While they reject true happiness, and are utter strangers to it, can they be

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surprized that what is not the *thing itself*, will not supply the *place* of it? In truth, it is well for them that a sinful course has so little satisfaction and advantage in it, and affords only vain pleasures; that one vexation and disappointment should succeed another, and even their dream of an earthly happiness be broken and disturbed; it is well, I say, that things are thus ordered, that men might be the easier persuaded to leave a sinful course of life, when it creates nothing but vanity at present, as well as ends in utter destruction. Whoever therefore would not add to the vanity of life, let him not persist in the paths of vice, which can have no pleasure or peace, or such only as is vain. These are the things we should avoid, because they increase vanity. There are *other* things which we should mind and practise, because they have a *contrary* tendency, *viz.* to *lessen vanity*, and to be a *balance* against it. Here these few directions may be of use. Let us make *sure* our *title* to the *better* life, which remaineth for the *people of God*; let us endeavour after the most *clear* and *lively* apprehensions of the transcendently great and glorious *happiness* of that life, and keep the *idea* of it *steadily* in our *view*; and let us strive to *excel* in *those* virtues which are the only *qualification* for the *life of heaven*, and be much in those

exercises

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exercises which most *directly* prepare for
it.

I. LET us make *sure* our *title* to that *better* life which *remaineth* for the *people of God*. It is strange, how we can be easy without it, and it would be still more strange, if we should not be easy and satisfied with it. Certainly, Christians, there cannot be a question of greater importance to us than this: have I *any* part in the life to come, or have I *not*? The question is the same, in meaning, with this other: *am I to be happy for ever, or everlastingly to despair of it?* And, if such a question as this does not concern us, it is impossible any should: and if the importance of this question be the greatest that can be, the present advantage of deciding it, if we justly decide it in our own favour, is very great. If I cannot return that answer to the question which I would, yet, by taking the right method, I may do it in some time, so as to be able to say, that I have good hope, thro' grace, of entering into eternal life. And what thought like this, to remedy the vanity of the present state? I now no longer pass my days in starting and pursuing one vanity after another; I have done with great expectations from this life, having infinitely greater beyond it: the hope of heaven preserves me

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from

☞ Heb. iv. 9.

from ^x *setting my affections upon things on the earth.* When I see a man hurried amidst vain cares and pleasures, now lifted up with vain hopes, or joys, now cast down with sorrows and disappointments, no less vain; when I see him thus driven too and fro, like a leaf by the wind, can I think that this man has been *solicitous* about *another* life, and that he has at length arrived at some comfortable *assurance* of his interest in it? Why then is he so much taken up with this life? why does he build so much upon it? why is his soul so much affected with the changes of it? One would think, he who has his *portion* *above* the sun, should matter little what is done *under* it; and that in the same proportion as his *assurance* of *future* happiness grows, his *contempt* of all *present* things should do the same.

2. LET us endeavour after the most *clear*, and *lively* apprehensions of the transcendently great and glorious *happiness* of this future life, and keep the *idea* of it *steadily* in our view. It is for want of this, that we take so many wrong steps in life; that we so often wander out of the way, and tire ourselves with vanity. Either we are not well apprehensive of the nature and degree of the heavenly felicity, or we let the idea of it slip out of our minds, and so have it not ready

^z Colos. iii. 2.

dy for our use when we need it. No two things can differ more widely, than the happiness of the men of this world, and the happiness of the saints in heaven. One is the happiness of *brutes*, or of creatures raised but one degree above them, the other of *angels*; one is owing to *ignorance*, the other to *knowledge*; one consists in the *depression* of the reasonable faculties, the other in the *elevation* of them; one in *low, temporal, and fluctuating* enjoyments, the other, in those which are *spiritual, divine, and eternal*. Now, since such is the difference between this life and the next, as to the happiness of one and the other, and the next life is that which I design for, and hope I have secured; I must be guilty of a very great inconsistency in my conduct, if I act as they do, who think no happiness like that of the present life, and by this mistaken apprehension create to themselves a thousand vexations and disquietudes. My notion both of the afflictions and enjoyments of this world is, that they are *light, and but for a moment, and therefore not worthy to be compared with the exceeding, eternal, weight of glory*. While we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are not seen: because the things that are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal. It is certain, that they

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are

are not worthy to be compared together; and yet a persuasion of this, without the frequent thoughts of it, may not be sufficient to secure me against the influence of present things. I may be tost about upon this sea of vanity, and have little or no rest, unless *I look not to the things seen, and temporal; but to things unseen, and eternal.* I must labour to have my mind and heart deeply impressed with the sense of these glorious objects, to raise my conceptions of them, and by this means to awaken in my soul a nobler thirst of *glory, honour, and immortality.* Then the world would appear little and vain indeed; and by discerning its vanity, I should, in great measure, save myself from the effects of it.

3. LET us strive to *excel* in those *virtues*, which are the only *qualification* for the life of heaven; and be *much* in the *exercises* which most *directly* prepare for it. We are to practise all the virtues of the christian life, and to be filled with the fruits and graces of the Spirit. For our encouragement, every grace and virtue will be its own reward, particularly, by fixing and establishing the soul, and yielding it a great deal of pleasure. Every virtue, diligently practised, will have this effect, and much more all together. And the more our hearts are *established by grace*, the less

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less will they be moved with the agitations of this life. The more we enjoy of those pleasures which wait upon the practice of holiness, the better able we shall be to forego the pleasures of this life. Pleasures we had need have, of some kind or other; we all naturally seek pleasure, and can hardly be satisfied without it: consequently, if the mind has no better pleasures to entertain it, it will be apt to please itself with fond expectations from this world, will be still running after one vain appearance or other, and while it *experiences* and *complains* of the vanity of life, *continue* to be *deceived* by it. But now, as soon as a man applies himself to a religious life, endeavours to make every virtue his own, and is as intent upon being a *better* man in every respect, as others can be upon being *richer*, and more *powerful*; as he is too well employed to have that regard which others have to the vain objects about him, and to feel every change which happens in the world; so the delights which flow from right dispositions of mind, and a course of pious and good actions, are a preservative against the vain amusements and delights of sense. He can *have* any comfort, or *want* it; *use the world*, and not *abuse* it. We must likewise remember to be much in those exercises which do most *directly* prepare for the *life of heaven*, in commun-

nion with God, the contemplation of his divine excellencies, studying the unsearchable riches of his grace, recollecting his innumerable benefits, in prayer and praise, in thanksgiving and adoration. By these exercises, added to the constant practice of holiness, we shall come to enjoy much of heaven upon earth, so as to be more *deaden'd* to the present world, and ^a *to have our life hid with Christ in God*; the consequence of which will be, that the vanity of this life will hardly reach us; and the *more* vain our present state is, the more *desirous* we shall be of *exchanging* it for a *better*.

^a Col. iii. 3.





S E R M O N III.

Of our ignorance of what is good
for man in the present life.

ECCLES. vi. 12.

*Who knoweth what is good for man
in this life, all the days of his
vain life, which he spendeth as a
shadow?*

IN the former discourses on these words,
I took notice of the following things in
them as deserving our consideration.

I. THE account which the Wiseman
gives us of the present life; it is a *vain life*,
and *spent as a shadow*.

II. AN enquiry *natural* enough for all to
make, and *rightly* managed, very *necessary*
and *useful*, viz. *What is good for man in
this life?*

III. THE ignorance of man in this important point. *Who knoweth?* i. e. no man knoweth. The first of these, or the vanity of the present life, I have considered; and now proceed,

II. To the enquiry *natural* enough for all to make, and, *rightly* managed, very *necessary* and *useful*, viz. *What is good for man in this life?* The enquiry here meant is not concerning what is good for man as to his *actions*, but as to his *condition* and *circumstances* in life. What actions are *morally* good, and what *morally* evil, is plain to every one who will but consult his rule, whether *external* in the *scriptures*, or *internal* in his own *reason* and *conscience*. Solomon, the wisest of all men, would never have asked such a foolish question as this; whether it is good for man in this life to be virtuous, or not; religious, or not? The question answers itself. The thing here proposed to enquiry must be, *What is good for man*, as to his *condition* and *circumstances*, in the present life? who is the *happiest* person? what is the happiest state of all the events with which life is diversified? which are *most* for a man's *advantage*? Is it *best* for me that I should be in this condition, or another? that I should enjoy this or the other thing, or want it? be left to chuse my own lot, or have it chosen for me?

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When I say this is an enquiry *natural* enough for *all* to make, I would be understood to speak of all who are in any degree *thoughtful* and *considerate*; of all who have reason and understanding, and make use of them; not acting at random, or taking things upon trust, but desirous to know what they really are, and willing to take the pains needful to this end. Let us but suppose a man of this character, and one of the first enquiries he will go upon is, what is *good* for *man*? what is *good* for *me* in this *present* state of my existence? In paradise itself was there not one tree, which tho' it stood in the midst of the garden, and was perhaps as great an ornament to it as any, yet bore fruit fair indeed to the eye, but mortal in its effects? Are not the most beautiful plants oftentimes far from being the most innocent and wholesome? and may it not be the same in life? Is a thing *beneficial* because it *pleases*, or good because sense and appetite pronounce it good? If these were not the *marks* by which I may know and distinguish such things as are *really* good and beneficial, what are? This is the enquiry which I have said it is natural enough for all thinking persons to make, of which no thinking person will demand any proof; and no proof which can be given, will satisfy those who do not allow themselves time to think at all. I farther add, that this is an enquiry,

enquiry, when *rightly managed*, very *necessary* and *useful*. But when is this enquiry rightly managed? I answer, when we take care to *state* the question, or enquiry *right*, and bring with us *right dispositions* of mind in order to the solution of it.

1. IT is highly expedient that we should lay down a *right state* of the question. The question rightly stated is this; *What is good for man*, as to the *present* time, *all things considered*? not what is good, or what is *best*, in regard of this or that *particular* circumstance, or on this or that *particular* account, but upon the *whole*. We are not to view things on one side only, whether the brighter or the darker side, but to examine them all round. Again, *What is good for man*, taking the *whole of life* into the reckoning? Good for him not only *to day*, or *to morrow*, but *all the days of his vain life*? How will the thing turn out at last? what are the consequences likely to be? This makes a considerable difference in the question, since that answer which may be right enough, if we attend only to the present time, may, if we comprehend the future too, be very wrong. Finally, *What is good for man in this life*, considered as a *probationer for eternity*? The same things may not be good for him in this capacity, which might be good had he no relation

lation to any other life besides the present. If I must exist *hereafter*, and my after-existence is to be of a much *longer* duration than my present, ought I to pronounce myself happy or miserable at present, till I have first thought with myself what I shall be in my *next* remove? This is the first thing necessary to a right management of this enquiry, *What is good for man in this life?* We must be sure to *state the question justly*.

2. THAT the enquiry be rightly managed, we are concerned to bring *with us right dispositions* of mind, *i. e.* an *unprejudiced*, a *humble*, and a *pious* mind.

WE must make this enquiry with an *unprejudiced* mind, not biassed on one side or the other, or as little as possible. We must search our own hearts, and not suffer them to be possessed with a secret *fondness* for one condition, or *aversion* to another. When the mind harbours any prejudices, it will see advantages or disadvantages which have no existence but in its own imaginations. Without due inspection and care, we may be prepossessed for or against, and yet not be aware of it. We must therefore labour, as far as the thing is in our power, to be *indifferent* as to any particular state of life; not earnestly wishing that this, or another, may prove the best, but only concerned to know which is best, and that Providence may place us in
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that state whatever it be. It is a very good rule in the search after *truth*, and is no less proper in the enquiry after *happiness*, to have the indifference of travellers, who have no other solicitude than to hit the right road ; especially when there is great danger of missing it, and if they do, they may be carried far away from the place for which they are designing.

A *humble* mind is likewise necessary. A mind sensible of its own weakness and proneness to mistake, thro' the multiplicity of objects, the intricacy of cases, and its own obscure and bounded view of things. How can that man otherwise than go astray, who trusts to his own sufficiency ; who thinks he has no need of a better guide, and refuses a higher guidance when it is offered him ? The promise is to persons of another character : ^b *The meek will be guide in judgment, the meek will be teach his way.* It may be justly said, he who walketh *humbly*, as well as he who walketh *uprightly*, *walketh surely*. He who has a due sense of his own imperfection, will come with diffidence to this enquiry. He will be apt to think himself no competent judge in a question of such a nature, and therefore will not be *hasty* or *positive*. He will look higher, and beg illumination from heaven : *O Lord, I put my trust in thee, let me*

^b Psal. xxv. 9.

me not be ashamed! I would not lean to my own understanding, but desire to put mine understanding under the conduct of thine infinite wisdom. Which minds me of the other thing, viz.

THAT there must be a *pious mind*. A person of this temper will think, whatever is for the *glory* of the supreme Being, must be for his *own good*. He will refer himself unto God, depend upon God, follow God. Endeavour to have his judgment of things conformable to the divine; and be *best* pleased with that condition in which we can *do most* for God, and the best capable of glorifying him, by exhibiting an example of every grace and virtue. Let us but manage our enquiry in the manner now prescribed, and we shall find it to be exceeding useful, particularly in these two respects. That we shall be *better able to judge* what is good for ourselves, than we should otherwise be; and that we shall have a *stronger* and a *fuller* conviction of our own *ignorance*.

I. THE first advantage of such an enquiry, *What is good for man?* carried on as I have now shewn, will be this, that we shall be *better able to judge* what is good for ourselves, than we should otherwise be; having a *clearer* discernment of our *own*, and *more* reason to expect *direction* and *assistance* from

the father of lights. Tho' we should not, after all our enquiries, arrive at *certainty*, yet we shall see where the greatest *probability* lies. And this will be of valuable service in determining our pursuits. We shall not be so apt to endeavour after this or that condition or enjoyment, which is not likely to fit us, or for which we are not fitted. And when we have mist of our aim, and by the event find that the judgment we made was wrong, we shall sooner discover where the mistake lay, and what there is in our present condition, which should reconcile us to it. Being accustomed to estimate things by other rules, and to make our enquiries with another temper of mind, than the generality do, we shall show *more* prudence in the conduct of life, and have a *greater* sagacity in things which relate to the *true* happiness of it.

2. THE other advantage of this enquiry, rightly managed is, that we shall have a *fuller* and *stronger* conviction of our own *ignorance*. But is there any satisfaction in being ignorant? Not, perhaps, in our ignorance itself, but in the knowledge of it. That is, there is great advantage attending it, and advantage to a wise man will be the ground of satisfaction. For when, after sufficient enquiry, we perceive the nature of the

the thing is such, that there is no coming to a certainty in it, we shall *provide* for this *uncertainty*, and consider what we have to do, in a case where we *know* so little, and must *venture* so much. Whereas they, who, while they are as ignorant, perhaps, as others, what is good for themselves, have a great conceit of their knowledge, and will not allow that they are, or may be, out in their calculations, will unavoidably be guilty of many wrong steps; and by their *confidence* first, and their *disappointments* afterwards, not only create themselves a great deal of needless trouble, but ^d *fall into temptation, and a snare, and into divers hurtful lusts, which drown men in perdition.* And this brings me to the other observation.

III. THE *ignorance of man* in this important point, plainly intimated in the question, *Who knoweth?* i. e. *no one knoweth what is good for man in this life.* One man may *guess* better than another, but no man *knoweth*. *Knowledge* and *conjecture* are two things. In what we *know*, we can never be deceived, which we easily may in our *conjectures*. There is, without doubt, such a thing as *prudence*; nor does what is said in the text, any way discourage the exercise of it, in the affairs of this life, in the choice of *ends*, or of *means*. On the contrary, no man is so likely

likely to have that wisdom, which is *profitable to direct* us in ordering our actions, and shaping our course, as he who weighs things in the balance of an upright mind, and by comparing them one with another, seeks to know which of them are to be prefer'd. And where such care and circumspection happen to be joined with a good natural understanding, such men will not so often be mistaken in judgment, or in chusing for themselves, or others, as they are, who have neither the same natural nor acquired prudence. But still, though they may come *nearer* the truth in the question, *What is good for man in this life?* and oftener hit it, yet they cannot at any time be *certain*, and sometimes prove to be actually *mistaken*, in their most probable determinations. How this comes to pass, we shall be more sensible, if we consider the question, as before stated, in three different lights.

1. WHAT is good for man, for the *present time, all things considered?* Can it possibly be otherwise, but mortal man must labour under great ignorance of the subject of this question, and be utterly unable to return a positive answer to it, as thus expressed? For, what is *good* for man, as to the present time, but that which makes him happy for the present time, or as happy as he can be at that time?

time? And what is it to be *happy*, but to be void of anxious and disquieting thoughts? Is not he the most happy man who is the most easy? who has most peace and tranquillity of mind, is most free from inward discomposure, most master of himself, and most satisfied with himself? Is not he, whose picture this is, the happiest man, other things being equal? But am I sure, that in such a particular situation, I shall meet with *less* to disturb and ruffle me, than in any other whatsoever? I see, (or, to speak more properly, I think I see,) the *advantages* of such a condition. But do I see the *disadvantages* of it? Am I certain, that the former of these outweigh the latter? or, that whatever the advantages are, they are *equal* to those of some *other* condition? May there not be *hidden* cares and sorrows, of which, having had no *experience*, I have no *idea*? And can that be good for me as to the present time, which fills me with bewildering cares, and lays me open to unknown grief and vexations? Is it good for man to pass his life in such a way as does not allow him any *enjoyment of himself*? But we may think, if there are *great cares and solitudes*, there are *great pleasures*. But can we be positive of this? After we have set the want of peace and tranquillity against the enjoyment of pleasure, will that pleasure which is left, make it a

wise bargain? it is well if it be a saving one. Besides which, it is worth enquiring, whether a *constant* quietness and composure of mind, with a *less* degree of pleasure, is not rather to be chosen, than a *larger* share of pleasure, with *less* ease and satisfaction of mind, and that too often interrupted? This shews what incompetent judges we are of the good or happiness *immediately* resulting from any condition. We give a preference to one state and way of life before another, without knowing what either will prove upon trial; which is another such preference as that would be, of one of two cabinets which we had not opened. We chuse it may be by the fineness of the outside, or by the weight; while that which is neither so weighty, nor so beautiful to appearance, may have the most valuable things contained within. To know the *suitableness* of this or that condition to us, we had first need know *ourselves* more thoroughly than we do; our *strength*, and our *weakness*, our intellectual and moral abilities, and endowments. That which suits another, may not suit me; what would be light and easy to him, may to me be a burden; that in which he has great satisfaction, may afford me none. The man must be adjusted to his condition, or he will never be happy in it. Now, give me leave to say, it is no easy matter for a man to get this
perfect

perfect knowledge of himself. It requires a deep insight into human nature in general, and into his own in particular. He must have made frequent observations on that part of his life which is past, and have heedfully remarked the various changes of his mind, in the changes of his outward condition. And, after all this, he may remain ignorant of something or other, which it is absolutely necessary he should know, e're he can tell what effect any condition will have on the peace and comfort of his life. Some new circumstance in his condition, which he has never yet tried, may awaken some new passion: or an addition in the same kind of enjoyments, may make a change in the mind, where there was none before. Thus, how often has it been known, that a man, who has had a great enjoyment of a moderate degree of wealth, and power, and reputation, on a considerable increase of them, especially if sudden, has lost the smoothness and tranquility of his soul, and felt anxieties and fears, to which he was till then a stranger: so that we had need know ourselves *more thoroughly* than we do, to be *certain* what is good for us as to these external things. And so likewise had we need have a greater knowledge of these *external things*, as well as of *ourselves*: what is their natural tendency, their ordinary effect? Is it in the

things themselves, to yield pleasure and satisfaction ; or is the pleasure they yield, more from *fancy* than from the things themselves ? What *sort*, and what *degree* of pleasure is it they afford ? and how far are these pleasures *consistent* with other *more* valuable delights ? Shall I not be a loser, if I am so entertained from without, as to have less entertainment at home in my own breast ? Suppose the pleasures are otherwise *innocent*, yet may they not engage me *too far*, and by so doing, rob me of more than they can give ? On the one hand, some external pleasures and amusements may be necessary for variety to unbend the mind, and heighten its relish for its proper pleasures ; on the other hand, the greatest danger is, of our forgetting that the soul has pleasures and enjoyments of its own, when the condition we are in is full of external agreeables and avocations. In this case, how difficult a thing is it to hit the *mean* ? not only in *practice*, but even in *theory*, so as to know what these circumstances are, in which we may enjoy most peace, and the greatest sum of pleasure. Such circumstances, if the consequences are answerable, are certainly good for us. But who certainly knows what these circumstances are ?

2. WHAT is good for man, *taking the whole of life into the account* ? Let the question be thus put, and our ignorance of what is

is good for man, will be still more evident. One event gives birth to another ; it may be to many, and, most or all these events, except the first which led the way to the rest, may be sad and afflictive. However, as we cannot foresee what the following events will be, we must of course be ignorant whether the event which at first sight appears so desirable, will in the sequel prove good or evil. A man may find himself in the condition of *Abraham*,^e when in answer to what God had said, *that he would be his shield, and his exceeding great reward*, (which he understood in part of great temporal blessings God promised to bestow upon him) he asks, *Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?* He may have great possessions, as *Abraham* had, and no one to inherit them. This may be a considerable abatement of the pleasure he takes in his abundance, and make it almost natural for him to wish that he had a child, or children, to whom his wealth might descend after him : but let him not presently conclude it would be better for him if he had, for this is more than he can tell. *Abraham*, indeed, had afterwards a son, who proved a blessing to him, and the crown of his old age ; but from the character of *Ismael*, we have no cause to think that he had the same satisfaction in him. It is plain,

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that

^e Gen. xv. 1, 2.

that Solomon, who had *many wives*, and only *one son*, was not the most happy father; which, it is probable, drew from him that grating reflection: ' *Yea, I hated all the labour which I had taken under the sun, because I shall leave it to the man who shall be after me; and who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewn myself wise, under the sun. This also is vanity.* He expresses himself in general terms, *who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man, or a fool?* that his observation might be of common use, and none knowing what they who come after them may prove, none may be over-confident or boastful in this respect. As to *himself*, if he did not *know* that his successor would be a *fool*, he knew men too well, to have much reason to promise himself that he would be a *wise man*. This is one instance among many of that connection of events, of which I just now took notice; of events which we would be glad should never happen, with others which we exceedingly desire, and in which, perhaps, for some time we *do*, or *should otherwise* rejoice. And since the links of this chain are too *subtle* for us to *see* them, and too *closely* joined for us, if we saw them, to separate them, we must be forced to confess,

† Ecclef. ii. 18, 19.

fess, that we do not know what is good for us. That which is good at first, may in length of time be quite otherwise; and 'tis not improbable, that this is one part of the sense of the words added, *for who can tell a man, what shall be after him under the sun?* not only what shall be after he is dead and gone, but in the future part of his life; this being subjoin'd as a reason of the foregoing question, *who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?* for who can tell him what shall be after him? how shall he know this, when he is utterly ignorant of futurity, and sees not the events of a different nature, with which the event may be big, which pleases him so much in the prospect or enjoyment? The question is not merely what is good for the present, but taken with all its effects and consequences, *all the days of our vain life.* Now, who can pretend to know what is good for him *all the days of his life*, when there is no man can say, what a *single day* may bring forth? The root of our present joys, may in the end be a root of bitterness. Wherefore let us wisely distrust our own judgment; and not only in words, but in our actions too, modestly disclaim a knowledge which we none of us have, and cannot possibly have, without particular revelation from God, which we have none of us reason to expect.

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3. WHAT is good for man in this life considered as a probationer for eternity? This very much increases the difficulty of determining the question. For whereas upon supposition of no life to come after this, it could not be good for any one to have his life fill'd up with affliction and sorrow, even *this* may be good for ought we know, now that we have the assurance of a *future state*, to which every thing in this life has its *ultimate* reference: every thing we *do*, every thing we *enjoy*, and every thing we *suffer*. Could we suppose there was no future state, no life to come after this, one might venture to say, that it would be good for man, that he should live in ease and comfort the little time he doth live; that he should not have his patience, his resolution, his fortitude, so continually, and so severely tried as some persons have theirs. And we might very well plead with *Job*;
* O remember that my life is wind, mine eye shall no more see good; as the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so man goeth down to the grave, and shall come up no more. Let me alone therefore, since my days are vanity. If this be my only life, let it deserve the name of life; turn from me, that I may rest till I shall accomplish as an hireling my day. Such reasoning, and

* Job vii. 7, 8, 9.

such language, would not be much amiss on supposition of no life beyond this. For to what purpose should we be thus inur'd to sufferings, and train'd up in a life of hardship and trouble, in case there was no hope of a state of rest and enjoyment to follow? What occasion could there be for those virtues, which had no relation to *another life*, and could not be exercised without taking away from the happiness of this? Whatever *other* ends it might answer, for God to make men spectacles of misery, one would think it could hardly be *for their own good*, if when their miseries ended, their beings ended with them. Did the case stand thus, health of body, a competency of worldly goods, a life free from contempt and reproach, might be pronounc'd universally good for man; forasmuch as a man could not be happy without them in this world, and had no reward to expect after death, for his patience under the want of them. ^h *No affliction is for the present joyous, but grievous*, whatever the Stoics might say, who had a language to themselves. All pain is evil, and no evil is to be chosen, but as it is the occasion of a greater good afterwards; nor can it be good for a man to suffer evils, which will not be succeeded by good things, that will make him sufficient amends for them. Upon supposi-

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^h Heb. xii. 11.

tion there was no life after this, things would be as I have now represented them; we might then say without presumption, that it would be good for man to have as small a share of outward trouble, as was consistent with his present interest and safety. But, my friends, this is a supposition, for which there is not the least ground. Thanks be to God, we have the greatest assurance of a future state of happiness, that can reasonably be desired. Whatever doubts may be left by the *light of nature*, concerning this important point, they are all removed by the *gospel*; so that we are to look on this *short* life, as a state of trial for one that is *eternal*. Our actions, our temptations, our afflictions, our comforts, all that is done by us, and all that befalls us, every relation, every event and occurrence, have some connection with *eternity*. And who then can say, that this, or that *is good*, or is *not good* for him? unless he certainly knows what influence it will have upon his everlasting state: of which who can be certain? That we may have a certain knowledge what is good for man as a probationer for eternity, three things are previously necessary to be known, *viz.* in what condition he shall run the *least hazard* as to his future state; in what condition he shall have the *greatest assistances* and *advantages* to prepare for another world; and finally,

SER. III. *of what is good for him.* 91

finally, in what condition he shall be likely to do most good to others, this being for his interest in the next life, whatever it should cost him in this. There are indeed some conditions and situations, in which the temptations are so many, and the opportunities of doing and receiving good so few, that we may reasonably conclude, without an *extraordinary call* of providence, they are not good for us; and if we have that regard which we ought to our spiritual welfare, shall not hesitate a moment, whether we shall endeavour to be in such a situation. But I am speaking of such a condition, in which there may be the appearance of less hazard, of greater assistances, and of our being likely to do most good: even in these cases we cannot pretend to know, how probable soever our conjectures may be, what is good for us.

As to the first, in what condition a man shall run the *least hazard* of miscarrying forever, who of us knows this, or who can tell us? Are we acquainted with the temptations of every state and condition? Do not the temptations of every state depend very much upon the character and disposition of the *person*, so that the same thing shall be a temptation to *one*, which is *not* so to *another*? Do we know our own strength, and how far we may rely upon
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our own prudence, dispositions, and resolutions? Alas, it might be great vanity in any of us to think so. And hence it has come to pass, that so many have found themselves weaker than they imagined, not able to withstand a temptation, which they made light of before they tried it; and *experience* has prov'd them not to be so wise and clear-sighted, as they were in their own conceit; being over-reach'd and seduc'd to the indangering of their souls. May there not be some *latent* passion, of which a man is not aware, which when he is in proper circumstances for it, immediately discovers itself? Happy had it been for thousands, if they had never had the opportunities to gratify their passions! Their passions, like fire in dry wood, and fann'd by the wind, burn and rage till they have consum'd them. He had need be a wise and good man indeed, who is proof against the snares and inticements of uninterrupted prosperity; for, according to the observation of Solomon, *the prosperity of fools shall destroy them*. What great numbers have been betray'd by pleasure, befool'd by gaiety and show, ensnar'd by riches, intoxicated by power? and hurried away by their predominant inclinations, have done things, of which they could not believe themselves capable, till their desires were rais'd and inflam'd

flam'd by the tempting object, and rendred too strong for them easily to govern? We are so far from having a perfect knowledge *one of another*, that there are few of us that know *themselves*, till a concurrence of circumstances gives them an opportunity to make the dangerous experiment. When the prophet *Elisha* tells *Hazael*, servant of *Ben-hadad*, king of *Syria*, what a cruel and inhuman enemy he would prove to the children of *Israel*, and *Hazael* replies, ^k *what is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* i. e. as that place is commonly understood, "what do you take me for a man
 " or a brute, that you should think I can
 " ever be guilty of such horrid barbarities?" the prophet gives him no other answer than this *The Lord has shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.* *Hazael* spake according to his real sentiments at that time; but as soon as he came to be possess'd of a sovereign power, that turn'd him into another man, or rather brought to light that part of the man which before lay conceal'd. What is meant by *God's hardning* the heart of *Pharaoh*, but placing him in such a condition, as thro' the corruption of his heart, and the ill use of his liberty, had this effect upon him? And in this sense, without any impeachment of his justice, there are daily instances of persons
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^k 2 Kings viii. 13.

whose hearts God has hardened. The temptations of one condition may prove too strong for us, those of another may not, and which then of these two conditions is best for us? doubtless that with the temptations of which we are best able to cope. That condition can never be good for me in the *event*, in which I fall, and stumble, and perish. This is one rule by which christians are to judge of the good or evil of external circumstances and events. Will sin take occasion from them to *deceive*, and *thereby* to *slay me*? will the temper of my mind be vitiated to a greater degree? shall I have my heart more alienated from God, and from the duties of divine worship? be prejudiced against serious religion, have my judgment and my relish of things depraved, and the tenderness and sensibility of my conscience lessened? shall I be more proud, be faster riveted to the present life, plunged deeper in the mire of sensuality, *lose* my *first love*, weaken any good habits, or strengthen and increase any evil? These things ought we to know, in order to know in what condition we run the *least hazard* of losing our souls, and consequently in what condition it is *good* for us to be.

THAT we may *know* what is *good* for man as a *probationer* for *eternity*, it is likewise requisite that we should know in what condition we shall have the greatest *assurances* and
advan-

advantages for our furtherance in the way of *salvation* and *happiness*. Bodily health is a great blessing, but the health and prosperity of my soul is of much greater importance to me. It is by my soul that I am related to an eternal world; for the happiness of which my only qualification must lie in the temper of my soul. And what are those circumstances which are best adapted under the influences of divine grace to beget and cherish such a temper? in what state of life will my soul be most free and vacant to attend its own proper business? to be able to dwell and converse with itself, and have its thoughts and affections most raised towards heaven? Some are best pleased with opportunities to make their *fortune*, as they call it, in the world, and no news so welcome as of success in any of the designs and projects which they have formed with relation to the things of this life: but are there not other seasons and opportunities which more nearly concern us, whether we are concerned about them or no? *None* are utterly destitute of these precious opportunities, but *some* persons have *more* than others; happy he who has *most*, and improves them *best*. Who is that happy man, *i. e.* who is the rich, the great, the honourable in a spiritual sense? The man who has most of God in the character and form of his mind, and most of
heaven

heaven in the thoughts and exercises of it; in whom faith, and hope, charity, humility, meekness, and purity are still growing. If one condition of life has a greater aptitude, in subservience to the grace of God, to mould and fashion me to this character and temper; that condition, whatever it may be to outward appearance, and for another man, is undoubtedly best for me. But how shall I always discover which is this condition?

AGAIN, as a probationer for eternity, that I may *know* what is best for me in this life, I had need know in what condition I shall be likely to *do more good to others*: for, without all question, it is a *good thing to do good*; and he who hath both the inclination and ability to do most good, is, other things being equal, in the best condition of any man. But the unhappiness is, that very often in the same proportion as a man's *capacity* for doing good *enlarges*, his *inclination lessens*. Better for such a man if his capacity was not so great, especially if, as his circumstances enable him to do either a great deal of good or a great deal of mischief, he chuses to make an ill use of his abilities rather than a good one. It is not therefore in what condition shall I be *capable* of doing most good, but shall be *actually* most useful? that condition which will best suit my talents, and exert

excite in me a zeal to embrace the opportunities of serviceableness which it puts into my hands? This is the condition *best* for me, considered as upon my trial for eternity. But that such a particular condition of life, with such and such events, is the *very* condition here described, what mortal man is there that does or can *certainly* know? Thus I imagine the assertion in the text has been fully made out, *that no one knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow.* And now in what manner shall we *apply* this truth, so as that we may know it for our good? Why,

I. THIS should teach us *contentment*, whatever our condition has been, is, or may be. Has providence denied us those enjoyments and blessings which it has granted to some others? or have we been afflicted more than they? Supposing it, have we therefore a licence to murmur and complain? by no means. For, not to observe ¹ that *the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, the world, and all that dwell therein*, and that he may do with, and dispose of his own as he pleases; not to insist upon this, which would prove that no *injustice* is done us, I shall only remind my self and you, that we

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have

¹ Psal. xxiv. 1.

have no reason to think God has been *unkind* to us if he has done what is *best* for us. And will any pretend to say that he has not? The question is not what things are *best absolutely* considered, or what things are best with relation to *another* person, but what is best for *me*. My condition may not have been the best in itself, or so good as another man's; but if best for me, I ought at least to be silent, and to possess my soul in patience, I might have said in thankfulness too. Have I *needed* the afflictions which I have suffered? that I have *deserved* them, is past dispute; and since *affliction* does ^m *not arise out of the dust*, but comes by the will of God, I ought to think that I have *needed* them too: and then why should I complain? Ay --- but others have escaped without the same afflictions --- possibly because they did not so much need them. Or, say they did, so much the greater is my advantage, in that God has not let me go without *needful* chastisement, as he has done some others. Did not I, by my own ill conduct, make such and such afflictions necessary? This is too frequently the case; and when it is so, tho' we have reason to be humble for our sins which called for such severe discipline, and if you will, to be angry with ourselves, yet surely none at all to be discontented and
uneasy

uneasy about the dealings of God with us. Let me add, we are not *easy* with our own condition as often as we *envy* that of *another* man, for which there can never be a just foundation, whether the condition he is in be good for him or not. If it be good for him, in envying him we offend against *charity*; if not, against *common sense and reason*.

2. By what has been said on this subject, we are taught how to *regulate* our *desires* and *prayers* with relation to the good or evil things of this life, *i. e.* not to be too *particular* or too *positive*. This is the instruction we draw from our ignorance. The wiser *beathen* were sensible of this, which makes * *Socrates*, a *pagan* philosopher, commend the poet, who seeing his friends importunately striving and praying for things not conducing to their real interest, prefers this petition for them all; "O *Jupiter*, the King, " give us the things most convenient for us, " whether we desire them or no; and as " for evil things, notwithstanding all our importunity for them, keep them from us." And it seems the *Lacedemonians*, a people of *Greece*, made this a rule in all their prayers, whether private or publick, keeping within this general form of request, " that God " would grant them what was good and

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" honour-

* *Vid. Plat. Alcib. 2.*

honourable." The *Latin* satyrist **Juvenal* has a great many excellent reflections to the same purpose. "The gods, saith he, have intirely overturned families at their own request." He then shows how dear some men had paid for their ill-weigh'd petitions, for those riches, that power and eloquence, for the chief places in the commonwealth, and even for royalty, for which they so earnestly contended, and in which they so much prided themselves; concluding thus: "If you will hearken to my advice, leave the deity to determine what is most useful and convenient for us. Instead of pleasing things, he will give those that are fittest. Man is not so dear to himself as he is to the powers above. We, under the impulse of blind desires, are earnest for this, or that thing; but they know what the object so earnestly coveted will prove. Would you pray therefore, let it be, that you may have a *sound mind* in a *sound body*; ask a soul superior to the terrors of death, and all the labours of life; a soul free from the tyranny of passions, and chusing rather to struggle with difficulties, than to swim in pleasure." Nor are instances of this kind wanting in sacred scripture. "Rachael, cries, *give me children or I die*, and dies in child-bearing. The

* Satyr. 10.

" Gen. xxx. 1. xxxv. 16, 17.

The children of *Israel lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert: God gave them their requests, but sent leanness into their souls*°. The gifts which they extorted from God by their obstinacy, were not blessings to them. Let us therefore, in imitation of our divine master, learn to pray, and with the same sincerity and resignation, *p not my will but thine be done!* May it not often be said to us as it was said by Christ to the disciples? *ye know not what ye ask.* ^r The apostle is express *that we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the spirit helpeth our infirmities, and maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And he that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.* Which words may be thus paraphras'd, “ the Spirit of God, besides the
 “ hope he begets in christians of *future rest*
 “ and happiness, does even now help their
 “ infirmities, and succour them under the
 “ pressures of this mortal life, which they
 “ have not strength enough of their own to
 “ bear. Nay, the Spirit not only helpeth
 “ their infirmities, by enabling them to
 “ support their sufferings, but by directing
 “ their desires and requests; while in a

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“ suffer-

° Psal. cvi. 14, 15. p Luke xxii. 42. q Mat.
 xx. 22. r Rom. viii. 26, 27.

“ suffering state they hardly know how to
“ suit their prayers to what is convenient for
“ them. Nature dictates the desire of ease,
“ but this is not always best. The *spirit*
“ *maketh intercession* within us, by suggesting
“ to us such desires as cannot but be accepta-
“ ble in the sight of God.” These desires
cannot always be particularly exprest, because
in this or that circumstance we are at a loss for
what to make our particular requests; and
these are the *groanings which cannot be ut-*
tered. But then in this uncertainty, being
guided by the spirit of God, we pray in ge-
neral, *father, glorify thy name.* Do that
which thou knowest to be best. *Let thy*
will be done on earth as it is in heaven, this
is the secret language of the heart, and God
who is the searcher of hearts knoweth it, and
approves and accepts it as the voice of his
own spirit in us, which never raises any de-
sires and inclinations, but what are per-
fectly agreeable to the divine will. Our
desires, as far as they are purely our own,
and proceed from our separate views and
judgments of things, may be sometimes
wrong; but can never be so, considered as
the productions of the spirit of God. † Our
Saviour, in the prayer he taught us, directs to
pray in general, that *God would give us our*
daily bread, and deliver us from evil: with-
out

† Mat. vi. 11.

out specifying the external comforts and accommodations we might desire, or the particular disagreeable occurrences we might wish to be secured against; but leaving it to the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father to determine what is convenient for us, and what would prove upon the whole *really* evil. Let us therefore from hence learn to pray, that God would always put us in that condition which he sees to be fittest for us, and that he would fit us more and more for that condition in which he places us, whatever it be; granting us wisdom and grace to behave in it after a right manner, and both to discern and improve the advantages annexed to it. By this means, where there was no appearance but of a *barren desert*, we shall discover *mines of gold*. I would entreat *young* persons in a particular manner to consider this. The desires of youth are generally strong and impetuous, and their imaginations gay and lively, and at the same time they generally want the prudence which should direct and govern them. And hence it proceeds that they are so apt to reject the advice of their best friends, to rely upon their own notions of things, and to be confident of success in whatever they propose. Not reflecting, that if persons of the ripest judgment and greatest experience are often deceived in their desires

and pursuits, they must be much more liable to be deceived, who with less light in their understandings have more fire in their tempers. How were it to be wished therefore they would distrust themselves more, be more open to good counsel, call to mind that the world and its enjoyments will not answer the mighty expectations which they generally entertain from them; and being possessed with such thoughts and reflections, would, by humble prayer and a life of virtue and piety, put themselves under the care and guidance of Divine Providence? Their journey thro' life, which they are but entering upon, would, by this means, be not only more *safe*, but really more *pleasant* too. And this brings me to my last inference.

3. SINCE no one *knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow*, let us be so wise as to *leave* ourselves and ours, and whatever concerns both, in the *hands* of God, and continually *repose* our trust in his good *providence*. We cannot do a *wiser* thing than this, nor one more *pious*. It is God that governs the world, and orders events, and not we; so that were we never so positive of the wisdom of our schemes, after our thoughts have been hunting up and down in future time, presenting such and such scenes to us, things shall not be as we
I imagine

imagine they will, or fancy they should be, but as it pleases God, who disposes of all things in heaven above, and on the earth here below. This universal King, whatever we may conceit in our great sufficiency, is not only wiser with regard to the whole, but with respect to the interest and happiness of any particular person, than that person himself can be. He knows what is good for *man*, for *every man*, *all the days of his vain life*. Nor is there any thing marvellous in this, that God should have a knowledge which we want: for must not he who made us, perfectly know our frame? Are not the most secret springs of action in our souls open to his eye? and as he knows *persons*, so he knows *things* too, the good and the evil which is in them. He knows them from the beginning to the end, by means of which thorough insight both into persons and things, he knows how to adapt one to the other; and can farther, by his operation on our minds, so turn and frame them to the condition we are in, as to *produce* a fitness and a conformity between them, if there was none before. As a farther motive to place our trust and confidence in God, let us consider, that he who is so *wise* as to know, with absolute certainty, what is good for us, is so *gracious* and *kind* as to have it always in his *purpose*, and to contrive all events for our *happiness*,

pinefs, if in all our actions we seek his glory. And what his *wisdom* and *goodness* design, he has *power* sufficient to execute; so that it is impossible things should ever issue otherwise than he would have them. And how he has determined they shall issue we are told by the apostle: *‘We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.* You see nothing is excepted. The promise is without any limitations: and how little reason then have I to trouble myself that I do not know what is good for me, and if I did, could not provide it for myself; when the all-sufficient and unchangeable God has promised, *that all things shall work together for my good?* But let me not mistake, the promise is without *limitations*, but not without *condition*. It is only to them who *love God*. Here then is the thing, the only thing about which I am to be solicitous, that *I love God*, and make it *manifest* in the whole course of my *actions*, that I love him. This one thing being sure, there is nothing left that should break the peace of my mind, whether relating to myself, or those who are dearest to me in the world. If I love God, and in the best manner I am able discharge my duty to him, and to those of my fellow-creatures, whom nature or providence have committed to my care, and use
all

SER. III. *of what is good for him.* 107

all the prudence I am capable of, he will mercifully accept me, and answer the trust I repose in him, directing every circumstance of life for my advantage, and so likewise for theirs, whose welfare I tender as my own, if they are not inexcusably wanting to themselves. However that be, having done my duty, I have abundant reason to be satisfied, and should pass my days, with all the *tranquillity* which the *testimony* of a good conscience, and a *firm hope* in God *all-wise, all-gracious, and all-powerful*, can afford.



S E R-



S E R M O N IV.

The vanity of the present state consistent with the perfections of God.

R O M. viii. 19---22.

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly; but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope: because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption; into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

TH E general *character* or description of sincere christians, by which they are distinguished, not only from persons who live without the pale of the church, but from others who bear the same name without

without *deserving*, because they do not adorn it, is this; ^a *That they walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit*: by which is meant, ^b *that they do not mind the things of the flesh, but the things of the spirit.* Not the body and the bodily life, with its actions and pleasures and enjoyments, are the *principal objects* of their care and regard; but those things of which the *spirit of God* has made a clear discovery in the *gospel revelation*; and to which the *spirit of man*, under his influences and operations, is prompted to aspire. And consequently, the *object* of their *desires* and *pursuits* not being carnal but spiritual, the *spring* and *rule* of their *actions* cannot be the inclinations or interests of the *body*, but the *spirit of Christ*, and the law of that divine Spirit. And great are the privileges of such persons; as great as their *character* is excellent. *To them there is no condemnation*; their sins being forgiven them, through the tender mercies of God, and the atoning sacrifice of the Redeemer, they are no longer liable to the penalties threatened by the law against all the transgressors of it: and they are not only freed from the *guilt*, but from the *dominion* of sin. *The law of the spirit of life, i. e.* the gospel accompanied with the dispensation of the Spirit, having made them free from the law of sin and death, their spiritual-mindedness is rewarded

^a Rom. viii. 1.^b Ver. 5.

rewarded with *life and peace*. The spirit of God *dwelleth in them*, actuates their faculties, and animates their hopes. And though their *body be dead because of sin, yet the spirit is life because of righteousness*. The body being subjected by sin to the law of mortality, may be looked upon as already dead, its death being fixed by an immutable sentence, and not a great way off; but then the soul or spirit of the man is entitled to a happy and never ending life, for which also it is prepared by those habits of righteousness and goodness with which it is possessed. And though the body die, yet shall it be quickened or raised again, *by the spirit of him who raised up Christ from the dead*: his resurrection being intended as the pattern of theirs, who now imitate the example of his life; and his spirit imparted to them as the pledge and earnest of it. Hence it follows, that as they have the name of the *sons of God*, so it is not an empty title; but makes them *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*; that is, gives them right to *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away*, bestowed upon them by the infinite bounty of the father of mercies, thro' the mediation of his only-begotten and well-beloved Son. But then this supposes them willing and resolved to *suffer with Christ*, if need be, that they
may

SER. IV. *consistent with God's perfections.* III

may be also glorified together. And this is another very considerable *privilege* of true christians, that they are made superior by their religion, and the prevailing influence it has upon their tempers, to all the pains, and wants, and infelicities of the *present time*, the *sufferings* of which they reckon not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in them. After which follow the words of the text: *for the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God, &c.* The connection of which with the preceding verses, seems to lie thus: in the 18th verse it is affirmed, that there is no comparison between the *present sufferings* of the true followers of Christ, and their *future glory*: for, (saith the apostle,) *the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God; i. e.* nothing in this world, good or evil, is fit to be compared with that future glory, inasmuch as *the glory to be revealed*, which is here also stiled *the manifestation of the sons of God*, consists in that compleat and everlasting perfection of the human nature, towards which there is a secret tendency in all rational creatures; in the greater number more *weak and obscure*; in a few who are more *virtuous and considerate*, one which is more *strong and explicit*.

THE

THE following propositions are contained in the words, and of too much importance not to deserve our most serious consideration.

I. THE *gospel* gives us *assurance* of a most *excellent* and *blessed* state, reserved for good men in another life; described by two characters, its being *the manifestation of the sons of God*, and a state of the most *glorious liberty*.

II. THE *present state* of *mankind* is a state of *vanity* and of *bondage to corruption*.

III. To this vain and corruptible state they were *originally* brought into *subjection*, not by *themselves*, but by *another*.

IV. IN this state of *vanity*, under which the *whole moral creation* *groaneth and travaileth in pain together*, the human race has an *earnest expectation* or *desire* of a condition *more perfect* and *happy*.

V. MEN have not been without the *hope* of such a happy *alteration* in their condition, which in the text is expressly asserted and *promised*.

I. THE *gospel* gives us *assurance* of a most *excellent* and *happy* state, reserved for good men in *another* life, described in the text by these two characters; of its being the *manifestation of the sons of God*, and a state of the most

most glorious liberty. The proof of such a state from the gospel-revelation, I shall not now meddle with. No one, who has read and believes the New Testament, can doubt of it, every part of the gospel supposing the truth of this doctrine, and the whole frame resting upon it; so that take away from the christian the certain hope of life and immortality, and the great design of christianity comes to nothing. The apostle *Paul*, in his first epistle to the *Corinthians*, chap. xv. goes further, putting the truth of the christian religion, not barely upon the certainty of a future state of happiness in general, or the immortality of the soul only, but the resurrection of the *body* too; saying, *if the dead rise not, then is Christ not risen; and if Christ is not risen, then is your faith vain, you are yet in your sins: i. e.* for any help that the gospel can afford you. The evidence, therefore, is the very same for the truth of the *gospel*, and of a state of *complete and everlasting felicity*, to be enjoyed by all those who live according to the rules of it, as one of the chief and fundamental articles of which it is composed. And as the proof of a blessed and glorious immortality from the christian revelation is less needful, upon the account of its self-evidence to every one who is acquainted with the scriptures of the New-Testament; so the thing is rather implied, than directly

asserted in the text, which mentions it on occasion of something else. I shall, therefore, at present only consider the *representation* which the apostle has here given us of this most glorious and blessed state, under these two characters :

1. OF its being the *manifestation* of the *sons of God*. And,

2. A state of the most *glorious liberty*.

1. LET us consider this future happy state, which the gospel describes as the *manifestation of the sons of God*. It is plain, that by the *sons of God*, in this place, *good men* only are designed : for though it may be said of all men, that God is their father by creation, and that their souls being spiritual, intelligent, and immortal substances, are *his offspring* ; and tho' all who are received into the christian covenant by *baptism*, are in a still more distinguishing sense the children of God, by virtue of an *external adoption* ; yet the phrase of the *sons* or *children* of God, in its highest meaning, is only applied to persons of sincere inward piety and goodness, and can be intended of no other, in this passage ; since the happiness of the heavenly world here described, can belong to none but such. Good men are the *sons of God* upon a double account, *viz.* of their *nature*, and of their *state* ; each of which is becoming that high title of the children of God.

SER. IV. *consistent with God's perfections.* 115

In respect of that *new nature* of which they are partakers, they are justly stiled the children of God; he being both the *author* and the *pattern* of it. Are they regenerate, or *born again*? it is of God. ^f *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is Christ, is born of God: of the word of God: ^g being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. And of his spirit: for, ^h except a man be born of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* This then is one ground of the title of the *sons of God*, that good men have derived their *new nature* from God as its parent: and that by means of this internal regeneration, they bear a near *resemblance* to the Deity in his moral perfections, his *holiness, justice, goodness, and truth*; this is another reason of the same name: ⁱ *that ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven. For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.* This is given as a reason why they should *love their enemies, bless those who cursed them, and do good to those who hated them*; because, hereby they would prove themselves the children of God by *imitation*. And so again, in the concluding verse, *be ye therefore perfect, as your father in heaven is perfect.* After the

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same

^f 1 John v. 1.
ⁱ Matth. iv. 45.

^g 1 Pet. i. 23.

^h John iii. 5.

same manner the apostle *Paul* argues: ^k *Be ye followers of God as dear children*: as much as to say, the *children* of *God* are so denominated from their *likeness* to their heavenly father. Hence holiness is called ^l *a divine nature*, and *the life of God*. And as in respect of their *nature*, this title of the *sons* of *God* belongs to *good* men, so in respect of their *state*. They have the privileges of children, and particularly that highest privilege of being the objects of *God's* paternal love and care; and, as the natural effect and fullest evidence of that love, entitled to a glorious inheritance, as the apostle reasons in this chapter: *The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ*. No expressions more common than that of *son* and *heir*. Who should inherit but *children*? This custom obtains universally in all nations, whence the allusion is here taken. The father in the ^m parable, tells his eldest son: *Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine*. And so *St. Paul*, speaking to christians, whom he supposes to be really such, saith; ⁿ *All things are yours*; immediately adding the reason, *and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's*. After this account of the *title* of the *sons* of *God*,
with

^k Eph. v. 1.^m Luke xv. 31.^l 2 Pet. i. 4.

1 Cor. iii 2.

Ephes. iv. 18.

SER. IV: *consistent with God's perfection.* 117

with which all good men are dignified, it will be easy to conceive what is meant by their *manifestation* in the future state. What can it mean, but their being put in *possession* of the heavenly *inheritance*, publickly owned in the presence of angels and men, and *appearing* in a manner suitable to their quality?

° *Now the world knoweth them not, because it knew him not.* While the *only-begotten* of the father was in the world, the world did not generally acknowledge him, notwithstanding his being so plainly pointed out to them by his life, and doctrine, and works.

p *He came to his own, and his own received him not:* and therefore it is no wonder if his disciples, who have nothing but their lives to distinguish them, remain concealed, and are looked upon as the *children of folly*, rather than as the *children of God*. But there is a time coming, when they will be better known; when they shall put off their present *disguise*, and put on *immortality*. Could an unbelieving world behold the Redeemer in his exalted state, encompassed with a brightness surpassing that of the sun at noon-day; it were impossible they should continue in their unbelief; but, like ^a St. Paul, when *there suddenly shone round about him a light from heaven*, as he was travelling to *Damascus*;

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cus;

° I John iii. 1.
ix. 3.

p John i. 11.

a Acts

cus; the stoutest infidel would be ready to cry out trembling and astonished, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do!* Some rays of this heavenly glory shall be derived from the exalted head upon all his members, according to that of St. *John*; *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be. But we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.* And hence the final happiness of the saints is called their *glorification*. It has this name from the glory that shall surround them, and mark them out for the *sons of God*. And that this is immediately intended by the *manifestation* of the *sons of God*, is plain from the connection of the words with the 18th verse: *for I reckon the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.* To have done right, our translators should not have used different words, since the word rendered *manifestation* is, in the original, the same as that rendered *revealed*. *The sons of God shall be revealed, or manifested, by the glory that shall be revealed in them.* Some have thought, that our first parents, in the state of innocence, had a *body of light* superinduced upon their terrestrial bodies,

bodies, of which being divested after their fall, they are said to ^r know, or perceive, *that they were naked.* However that be, it is most certain, that the *second Adam* is clothed himself, and will clothe all his followers with such a splendid robe; of which a specimen was given at his transfiguration on the mount: when not only he himself was changed, ^t *so that his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light;* but *Moses,* and *Elias* also, who talked with him, *appeared in glory.* Nor shall this future glory of the saints be *all outside,* a mere show and appearance, like the glory of this world, but attended with the most real and substantial advantages: be as glorious as they will *without,* they shall be still more glorious *within.* Their bodily splendor shall be only an emblem of that spiritual glory in which their souls shine in the eyes of God, of their Saviour, and of his holy angels; and no more than a dark shadow compared with that. They shall be *glorious in holiness,* and as happy as they are holy. This is the first view in which we are to consider the state of the saints, as the *manifestation of the sons of God,* when they whose ^u *life is now hid with Christ in God,* shall appear to be what they really are, being *predestinated to be conformed* to their exalted head.

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^r Genes. iii. 7.^t Matt. xvii. 2. Luke ix. 31.^u Col. iii. 3.

2. IT is farther represented as a state of *glorious liberty*. This most desirable freedom is indeed begun in the present life; * *for where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*: but then, as long as men continue in this world it is only begun. They labour under many frailties and imperfections, are liable to suffer many ways, and are not privileged from the necessity of dying; nor as to sin it self are they made entirely free, but only from its *reigning* power: but the state of final rewards will be a state of *compleat* liberty. As they are freed from sin, so from all its penal effects. There shall be no fear, or doubt, or sorrow, no disquieting and uneasy passions to afflict the soul; no infirmity, sickness, and pain, the body. The body shall be exempted from *death*, the soul from the *apprehension* of it. The body shall then be no more an occasion of sinning or suffering to the mind; but be compleatly fitted up for its entertainment and use. This our apostle calls * *the adoption, even the redemption of our body*. The body shall be redeemed from the grave; not by being restored to a life like that we at present enjoy, or but little better; a frail, troublesome, imperfect, mortal life: no, but from every thing which lessens the value of these bodies, so as to be active, impassible, immortal, as well as clothed with glory;

* 2 Cor. iii. 17.

* Rom. viii. 23.

glory; vehicles of pleasure only, and of a nobler kind than is often conveyed by the senses now; and many ways subservient to the soul in conversing with the works of God.

LET us make a brief reflection or two on this agreeable head.

I. SINCE the future state of good men will be so glorious and blessed, what reason have they to bear all the sufferings of the present time with a *contented* mind; possessing their souls in *patience*, and humbly *re-signing* themselves, and all that concerns them, to the will of God: forasmuch as *none* of these sufferings, nor *all* of them *together*, are *worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in them.* Their afflictions are *light*, and *but for a moment*; the recompence they expect is *an exceeding great*, and *an eternal weight of glory*; and which is more, one of these prepares the way for the other. Their sufferings are not merely an introduction to the state of glory, but have a tendency to exercise and increase those virtuous dispositions of mind, which are at once their title to, and qualification for that happy state. Why therefore should they be *weary and faint in their minds*? not to say why should they be impatient and discontented? For *discontent* there can be *no* excuse; and but *little* for great *sadness*, and *fear*, and *dejection*.

jection. Is it thus we consider *the glory that shall be revealed in the saints?* this all the influence which the meditation of it has upon us? It looks as if we did not often meditate on the happiness of a future state; because if we did, and had some good hope of being made partakers in it, other effects would be produced. ² *For while we looked not to things seen, but to things unseen; and considered that things seen are temporal, but things not seen are eternal: we should be much less affected with temporal things either good or evil, neither elated by one, nor oppressed by the other; being in a great measure raised above these things by the prospect and hope of glory, honour, and immortality.*

2. SINCE such is the blessedness and glory of that future state, in which there shall be a manifestation of the sons of God; it should be a powerful motive with them to *hasten* more towards it in their *desires* and *preparations*. Can they think of such a state, how certain it is, and how exceeding different from their present? how infinitely more valuable, so as to deserve their highest esteem, and most earnest application; and how spiritual, refined, and holy in its nature, so as not to be enjoyed by any but the *pure in heart*? can they think of this, and not feel a new spring within them, pushing them
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² 2 Cor. iv. 18.

on to the most vigorous endeavours after holiness? does it not excite them to leave this dirty earth, this thick misty troubled air, this obscure uncertain light, this cold uncomfortable region, this vale of tears, this abode of sin, this scene of distraction; and to mount upwards to those glorious mansions, where it is all peace, and pleasure, and innocence; where the body and soul both breathe nothing but *purity*, and the light is never clouded or withdrawn? Let them reflect *what manner of conversation* becomes those who hope to go to such a place, and there enjoy the presence of God, and of the Lamb, the noblest society, and the most divine and soul-satisfying joys.

3. SINCE such is the honour and privilege of all sincerely pious and good men, who are now the *sons of God*; and since such will be their happiness and glory, when the time is come for their fuller manifestation; would not one think that *all* should be *desirous* of this character, and *resolve* and *strive* to do every thing which may intitle them to it? would not one think that the *kingdom of heaven* should *suffer violence*? and that all who hear of such a state should be *hastning* into it in crouds? Surely it must be my wisdom to be religious! mine, your's, every one's! Nothing can be more evident, supposing the truth of the representation

sentation before made you ; as nothing can be more certain than *this*, *supposing* the truth of the *gospel* ; which without being supposed, may be easily *proved*, and has been over and over proved to the satisfaction of reasonable and considerate persons. Let us not therefore act as if we were not reasonable creatures, or lived where we had no opportunity of having our reason enlightened and assisted by the *gospel revelation* : let us live as the *gospel* directs, that we may have a right to those glorious things which the *gospel* promises, and finally enjoy them in the mansions of everlasting rest and felicity.

II. THE *present* state of *mankind* is a state of *vanity*, and *bondage* to *corruption*. I acknowledge, that by the *creature*, in the opinion of a great many, the *natural world* is meant, which by the sin of man is made subject to such imperfections and disorders, as did not belong to it in its original formation ; from all which, as they think, it shall be finally freed. And with regard to this variation of the natural frame of things, the *irrational* creation is represented by an elegant figure of speech, as *longing for the manifestation of the sons of God* ; i. e. for the consummation of ages, when this happy change of things shall be effected. This, I say, is the opinion of some ; but to me it seems very plain that it is not the meaning of this passage ;

passage : and that, on the contrary, by the *creature* we are to understand the *reasonable creature*, or *world of mankind* ; not only because it is a disputable point, whether there will be any such renovation of the earth *after the last fire* ; but because the expressions, of being made *subject to vanity, and unwillingly, and earnestly expecting the manifestation of the sons of God, into whose glorious liberty they shall be delivered*, are forced and strained if applied to the *inanimate or meerly animal creation* ; but very *natural* when understood of the race of *mankind*. And what confirms this interpretation is, that the scripture uses the word *creature* for mankind. ^a *Go into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature*, i. e. to all mankind. ^b *The gospel which has been preached to every creature* ; i. e. to all the nations of the earth. And the word is very properly used in *this* place for mankind in general ; since notwithstanding any other distinctions that are between them, they are all *alike* the *creatures* of God, and the *noblest* of his creatures here below : and as to the greater part of them, no more than his creatures, having *no* knowledge of God but as a *Creator*, not as their *Redeemer* by Jesus Christ. I shall therefore take it for granted, that I have expressed the true meaning of the words in
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^a Mark xvi. 15.^b Col. i. 23.

the proposition just mentioned, that the *present* state of *mankind* is a state of *vanity* and *bondage to corruption*. This may be explained in the following particulars. 'Tis a state of *fruitless expectations and desires*; a *suffering* state; a state of great *moral weakness* and *disorder*; and a state which *quickly passes away*.

I. IN the present life, mankind are subject to *many fruitless desires and expectations*.
 ' *All things are full of labour, man cannot utter it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing.* And this is a very great instance of *vanity*, that all our labours are in order to rest, and yet we never *attain* it; that one desire, and prospect, and hope, after another, rises in the mind, and the issue of all is *disappointment*. That we dig for treasure which we never find, and pursue a happiness which we never overtake; because the happiness we pursue is nothing but a shadow and appearance, which has nothing of body and substance in it. The *idols* of the *beathen* are in ^d scripture called *vanities*, yea, *lying vanities*; because they had only the *name* of God, without any of the *perfections* belonging to the true notion of Deity; and were not able in any degree to answer the trust and expectations of their worshippers. There is little difference in this respect as to those

^c Ecclef. i. 8, 9.
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^d Psal. xxxi. 6.

Jer. xiv.

those objects, which are most commonly, and with the greatest earnestness, follow'd by mankind. They are *vanity and a lie*. Men either toil for what they do *not obtain*; or having obtained it, they only find *a lie in their right-hand*. Things do not prove to be what they appeared at a distance. Those conditions and circumstances of life, which are reckoned the happiest by such as have had no experience of them, and excite in them envious wishes, are productive of a thousand vexations and disquietudes to the persons who are in them. And yet, which compleats the charge of vanity, those very persons who have experienced the emptiness and unsatisfactoriness of worldly things, are still enlarging their desires after them, at once *envied* by those below, and *envying* those above them; with every accession of wealth and power, and other earthly goods, (after they are gone beyond the real needs and uses of life) having less peace, and liberty, and self-satisfaction, and yet perpetually grasping at more of these very things, which are the causes of their greatest disquiet; and always bent upon increasing what they never truly enjoy. At the same time that the imperfections of all human things are so many and great, men's expectations from them are apt to run exceeding high; and both these meeting together, the meanness and defectiveness

tiveness of the things, with the over-grown opinions and hopes which mankind entertain about them, make this vanity exceeding great. There is a dissatisfaction *immediately* arising from the emptiness of things themselves; but this dissatisfaction would be nothing to what it now is, if we had *just* notions of all earthly enjoyments; and by these regulated our desires and expectations. But the unhappiness is, we deceive ourselves with imaginary prospects and groundless hopes, and then not finding things answer our ideas, create ourselves abundance of needless trouble and vexation.

2. THE present is a state of *suffering*.
 * *Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards.* We come into the world upon no other condition, but our being liable to a variety of sorrows while we are in it. Some escape better than others, but none come off entirely free. There is something or other in *ourselves*, or in our *circumstances*, to im-bitter the relish of life to us. Who can pretend to reckon up the several sorts of pains and diseases, to which the body of man is liable? or the many disagreeable accidents and mournful events, to which we are continually exposed, and which so often befall us in the course of life? What a vast deal does the *soul* suffer *from the body*, and *by the*
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body from the *world*? We may say in this sense, *that innumerable evils have compassed us about*; the briars and thorns, which the earth, in consequence of the primitive curse, brings forth in such plenty, are an emblem of the multitude of disagreeable occurrences we meet with, which are as *pricks in our eyes, and thorns in our sides*, and vex us in this wilderness wherein we dwell. Not to insist upon the *imaginary* evils of life, which are whole chargeable upon our own folly; what a cloud of *real* evils hangs over us? and of these, after we have set aside those which are of our *own procuring*, what a great number is there left which are *unavoidable*? There is no doubt, but by a discreet and virtuous management, many persons might pass thro' life much more happily than they do. What they suffer, is frequently no more, than the *natural* fruit of their own wrong conduct: and forasmuch as *this* is not necessary, no more is the *other*. It is indeed the necessary consequence of such a conduct, but it is not necessary *upon the whole*; since by forbearing those actions, which are the causes of their sufferings, they might avoid the sufferings themselves. But leaving these out of the account, the afflictions and troubles which the greatest *prudence* sometimes cannot guard against, and from which the *most distinguished piety and virtue* cannot

privilege men, are enough to disgrace the present state, and prove this is not the region where *happiness* dwells.

3. THE present is a state of *great moral weakness and disorder*. The *fall* has introduced a sort of anarchy into the human frame: the passions are broke loose, and the mind has not that command over the appetites and inclinations of the animal part, which it were to be wished, and which we believe the mind enjoy'd in the state of innocence. There is no question, but that even now, if the *rational* part *exert* itself as it ought to do, summoning up all its own strength, and vigilance, and resolution, and at the same time striving to engage the aid and protection of the *father of spirits*, and *God of all grace*; the soul might maintain its ascendant over the body, and notwithstanding all the stormy gusts of passion, keep the vessel from striking against rocks and quicksands, and steer it safe to the haven of eternal happiness. But tho' this may be done, and is *actually* done by all who heartily endeavour it; yet it must be *confest* not without some difficulty. We have not all that strength to do good, and overcome evil, which is necessary to make either of these *natural* to us, till we have been for some time accustomed to it. The balance breaks on the wrong side; the affections naturally run not in the right channel.

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SER. IV. *consistent with God's perfections.* 131

This disorder of our nature, as far as it is *purely natural*, is our *infelicity* only. I call it therefore a *moral weakness* and *disorder*; not as if it implied moral *guilt*, any farther than it is voluntary, but because of the relation it has to men's *subsequent* moral conduct; upon which, if not carefully watched against, it has a most unhappy influence. Nay, tho' I call it an *infelicity*, yet it is not *necessarily* so, but only thro' our *fault*; for it may be turned to our greater advantage in the final issue, if, with all the hindrances and opposition we meet with from natural constitution, as well as from temptations *without* us, we not only attain to the *truth* of virtue and piety, but to the more *eminent* heights of it; which *none* of us are under an *incapacity* of doing. The *temptations* of *some* are greater than of *others*, but of *none* absolutely unsurmountable. The *higher* degrees of *holiness* are *more* easily attained by *some*, but are *not unattainable* by *any*. For which reason, the use we make of our present weakness and disorder, should not be to excuse our sinful sloth, or criminal indulgences; or to sit down in despair of ever arriving at evangelical perfection; but to reflect on the necessity of greater diligence and watchfulness, and of constancy in our *prayers* to God, for his grace to assist us; and accordingly to re-

solve that we will not perish only for want of taking a little more pains to be saved.

4. THIS is a state which *quickly passes away*, or, which is the same, out of which *we quickly pass by death*, into another, in every respect almost exceedingly different from the present. ^f *Thou hast made my days as an hand's breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee : verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity.* And this frailty of man, I apprehend to be the principal meaning of the phrase, the *bondage of corruption*, from which the reasonable creature is at last to be *delivered*. This earthly body is frail, and corruptible, and mortal, not only by *nature*, but by the divine *sentence*. ^g *Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return* : not only mortal in the same sense that an *animal* body, or a body of flesh and blood, must always be mortal, unless preserved in life by some extraordinary and supernatural means ; but by a great *change* in the temperament and constitution of the body from what it originally was ; so that the human body is now so far from being fitted for an immortal duration, that there must be great care and good management, to make it hold out in tolerable health and vivacity a few score years : generally it falls back into the earth from whence

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^f Psal. xxxix. 5.

^g Gen. iii. 19.

it was taken long before that term. You know the Psalmist's computation, and the matter is not mended since ; ^h *the days of our years are threescore years and ten*, this is the common limit of what we call old age ; and *if by reason of strength they are fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow, for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.* Some persons, ⁱ *thro' fear of death, are all their life-time subject to bondage*, and perhaps hardly any have perfectly conquered this fear. Men fear it the more, because they see it so near them. And what an abatement must this make in the value of all human enjoyments, were they otherwise never so valuable ? May we not be allowed to say of all those things which continue for so little time, that they are *vanity* ? The ^k *fashion of the world* must needs be *vain* upon this account, that it quickly *passes* away : there being no proportion between the desires and the duration of the soul, and the possessions and enjoyments of the present state. There's an uncertainty too attending them, from the mutability of all things under the sun ; and were they in themselves more fixed than they are, yet the *life of man*, which is the foundation of them all, *is but as a vapour*, or a ^l *shadow*, which has *no abiding*.

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^h Psal. xc. 10.ⁱ Heb. ii. 15.^k 1 Cor. vii. 31.^l 1 Chron. xxix. 15.

AND now upon reflection, what need have we of any farther proof or witness of that *vanity* to which the reasonable creature is made subject in the present state? From infancy to old age it is all vanity, tho' under different kinds and shapes. Every age has its *proper* vanity, and so every condition of life, and every character too, excepting the *religious*. The *greater* part of mankind toil for a *livelibood*, a *great* part of them for *superfluities*, and *all* for *happiness*, with very little success. What a crowd of anxious cares, feverish desires, delusive hopes, uneasy fears, and jealousies, and surmises, have taken possession of the heart of man, banishing from thence that peace and tranquillity, without which life is but little worth: ^m *Man walketh in a vain shew, surely he disquieteth himself in vain.* He generally mistakes his true good, is surrounded with errors and delusions, wastes his life in folly, if not worse, and ⁿ *in a moment goes down to the grave*, without thinking whither he is going. For *too much* of this vanity we ourselves are accountable; but, behave how we will, tho' never so wisely and virtuously, a great deal of vanity and imperfection will cleave to the present state. And this brings me to the consideration of the next general.

III. To

^m Psal. xxxix. 6.ⁿ Job xxi. 13.

III. To this *vain and corruptible* state, mankind were *originally* brought into *subjection*, not by themselves, but by another. But of this, and the remaining propositions, in my next discourse.





S E R M O N V.

The Vanity and Corruption of the
present state reconcileable with
the perfections of God.

R O M. viii. 19--22.

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly; but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope: because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

IN a former discourse from these words, I gave you their import under five propositions, which deserved our serious consideration.

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I. THE *gospel* gives an *assurance* of a most *excellent* and *blessed* state reserved for *good* men in *another* life: describ'd by two characters; its being the *manifestation* of the *sons of God*, and a state of the *most glorious liberty*.

II. THE *present* state of *mankind* is a state of *vanity*, and of *bondage* to *corruption*. These two propositions I have considered, and now advance to the

III. To this *vain* and *corruptible* state, mankind were *originally* brought into *subjection*, not by *themselves*, but by *another*. You are to understand this of mankind in *general*, and of the *disadvantages* and *infortunes* to which they are *unavoidably* subject: not of *particular persons*, who very often lay the load upon their own backs, and if they enquired into the causes of the little comfort and satisfaction they have in life, will find none who have contributed so much to it as their own vices and follies. And if we consider the *whole* body of mankind, it cannot be denied that they have made their condition *worse* than it would otherwise have been, by their continued, and many times increasing transgressions. So far men *willingly* *enslave themselves* to vanity. But in general it is most certain, that the vanity of the present state is *originally* owing to *another* cause.

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This is expressly asserted in the text. The creature was made *subject to vanity not willingly*. It was not of their own choice, or as a *punishment* of the misbehaviour of every man, or even every generation of men, that the human race is involved in this melancholy state; not thro' their *own* sin, but the sin of *another*. The *first parents* of our race, having transgressed the sole command which was given them for the trial of their obedience, instead of securing that happiness and immortality to which they were destin'd in their creation, became a prey to *death*; to a thousand evils and calamities, and to a perpetual mutability of condition. And this change in the condition of our first parents, drew after it a like change in that of their *posterity*, as they successively came into the world; none of them being born upon the same advantageous terms, nor living in the same state of peace and tranquillity, which may reasonably be supposed would have been their lot, if there had never been a defection from the state of innocence. So that by him *who subjected the creature to vanity*, may be meant either the *first man* by his transgression in *eating the forbidden fruit*, or God for the sin of man: I rather incline to the latter, tho' the difference is not very material. Such honour had man in his creation, that God subjected to him, or ° *put under his feet*,

all other things. Such was the unhappy consequence of man's offending God, that from henceforth *man himself* becomes *subject to vanity.*

BUT how shall we vindicate this dispensation of divine providence? ^p *If the father eat four grapes, shall the children's teeth be set on edge?* must millions of reasonable creatures, capable of acting for themselves, be punished for ^a *one offence of one man?* In answer to this objection, I shall first vindicate the *justice* of God in this method of proceeding with the human race; and then his *wisdom* and *goodness.*

1. As to the *justice* of God, the case to any one who *rightly* considers it, is attended with *no* difficulty at all. Here that question may be asked: may not God *do with his own what he pleases?* is there any *injustice* in it? certainly none at all. ^r *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.* There is no dominion *among men* so absolute, as that of God over all persons and things: for it is a dominion over the *works* of his *own hands.* 'Tis true, were any one man, not to say the *greater part* of mankind, as the unavoidable consequence of the fall, put into a condition in which he would have reason to wish that he

^p Ezek. xviii. 2.

^a Rom. v. 17.

^r Psal. xxiv. 1.

he had *never been born* ; were he liable to the everlasting punishment of the next life for what he could not help ; nay, did he suffer the *least* evil under the notion of a *proper punishment* inflicted upon him for *another's* sin ; it would be a desperate undertaking in any one to clear the *justice* of such proceedings. But this is not the real truth of the case, however it has been *misrepresented* by some, and *misapprehended* by others. Nor does the scripture say any such thing. In the next life *every man is to be judged for the things done in his own body*. And tho' it cannot be denied that we are obnoxious in the present state to numerous *infelicities* and *temptations*, and to *death* itself, as the consequence of *Adam's* sin ; yet all this does not *necessarily* make any man's existence upon the whole *worse* than not *being* at all. And to whatever sufferings God sees fit to subject the human race by the present course of things, his intention is not to *punish them immediately*, or to express his *displeasure* against them, (any farther than for their own *personal* and *actual* transgressions,) but to exercise his *sovereign dominion*. This dominion of God, or right to take away what he has given, or to with-hold from some of his creatures what he gives to others, is as unquestionable, as in the exercise it is uncontrollable. No man
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can pretend to have a natural right to immortality, or to a state free from every kind of evil, and abounding with all kinds and degrees of good. Whence should a being have this right, who can call nothing his own, and not so much as his very being and faculties, all which are borrowed or derived? And as the dominion of God, or his right to put mankind into what state or circumstances he pleases, is indisputable; so he never exercises this supreme dominion of his, without good reason. And this brings me

2. To vindicate the *wisdom* and *goodness* of God in this dispensation. Not that we should have any ground to call the wisdom or goodness of this part of providence in question, tho' we were able to give no account of it; since in respect of *all the ways of God*, we are sure that they are *equal*, and that whatever he does is well done: nor that we can pretend in the most *obvious* cases, and much less in the present, to assign *all* the reasons of the divine conduct, or to say which are the *principal* of them. 'Tis enough that in general the infinite wisdom of God, joined with the perfect rectitude and goodness of his ever-blessed nature, gives us the utmost assurance of his always doing what is best; and that in considering any particular act of providence, we are able to produce such reasons as are sufficient to satisfy the friends
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of religion, and to silence its enemies. I shall, for this purpose, offer a few considerations.

1. IN respect of the *chief* consequences of the *fall*, God does little more than *leave* things to produce their *natural* effects. *Adam* having vitiated his own constitution, the *natural* consequence is, that he conveys a *broken* constitution to those who descend from him. The contrary cannot be without a *miracle*. In the course of nature every thing propagates its like. The *tree of life* would perhaps have been a *certain preservative* against *death*, till the body should have been rendered immortal by a change of its *animal* nature into a *spiritual* one; but the *tree of life* was a *supernatural* means, and rather a *sacrament* or sign of immortality, than a proper means of producing it by its own efficacy. From the use of this tree our first parents were justly banished for their wilful violation of an easy command, being turned out of *paradise*, where alone it grew. And now being born with bodies less happily tempered, so as to be naturally liable to sickness, and pain, and death, and not admitted to the only *universal restorative*, which was peculiar to the state of innocence; men must die without a *miracle*, or rather a continued *chain* of miracles to prevent it. And why God should be perpetually breaking in upon the
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the course of nature by him settled in the beginning, it will be hard to give a good reason. It is true, the *reduction* of the life of man to its present *short* stint seems to be something *more* than the *meer natural* effect of *Adam's* first sin. But if it was not the natural effect of that, yet it seems to have naturally followed ^t the punishment inflicted upon the first generations of men for their crying wickedness. After this, the life of man was brought within a narrower compass, by an *alteration* in the qualities of the *air*, and of the food upon which mankind liv'd; which was not more a *punishment* to the offenders themselves, than it was a *kindness* to their successors, for whom a *short* life is upon many accounts *better* than a very long one would prove. As to the *irregularity* in our *passions*, this *naturally* follows the *change* in the *bodily* constitution: the soul and body, by the laws of creation, having a reciprocal influence upon each other. And with regard to the ^u change in *external* nature, by means of which the world is made less commodious and delightful than before; we are to consider it as a *proper punishment* of the *first* sin, and of the incurable wickedness of the *antediluvian* race, who were very fitly punished in *this* way; and, according to the *settled* course of nature, their punishment

^t Gen. vi. 11.

^u Gen. iii. 17.

ment would unavoidably affect following generations, if God did not go out of the usual way of his providence to hinder it; which not having done, we may very well conclude was not becoming him to do.

2. SUPPOSING God had interposed in a *supernatural* way, directing and over-ruling the course of things, so that the posterity of *Adam* should suffer no *inconvenience* by his *fall*; yet in that case it cannot be imagined their condition would have been *fixed* without their having first gone through a state of *probation*, which must have been suited to the nature and advantages they would then have enjoyed. So that the *time* of their probation might have continued much *longer*; during all which, their final state would have hung in suspense: there might have been *no room* for *repentance* after they had sinned; and the *reward* of their obedience, if they had *persevered* to the end, might not have been so *great*, as the reward of the *virtuous* now will be. Which being considered, it may be justly questioned, whether on this supposition, the circumstances of mankind upon the *whole* would have very much exceeded those in which they now are, if at all. And whereas it may be suggested, that we could but have been placed in the state wherein we now are, after we had *forfeited* the privileges of innocence, (if we had for-

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feited them) by which means all would have had the same opportunity for happiness they have at present, and some, perhaps a greater number, have obtained a title to immortality by their *perfect* obedience - - -

To this it is a sufficient answer, that we have no reason to think, that if every one had been tried on the foot of innocence, they who misbehaved, and thereby lost their *first station*, would have been tried again in another way, in order to recover the immortality they had lost; if we may argue from a case somewhat parallel, I mean the case of the *fallen angels*. They seem to have been "*shut up under everlasting darkness*" for their *first sin*, because *every one* of them lost heaven by his *own* voluntary transgression. And so most probably it would have been as to our banishment from paradise, and the loss of immortality, if it had been entirely owing to *our own* folly and guilt. There would have been no possibility of ever regaining an admission to the presence and favour of God. We should have had no Redeemer to take flesh, and save us from the ruin into which each man had plunged himself.

3. IF it has pleased God to subject the race of mankind to a state of vanity and corruption; it does, in *many* respects, *better*

• Jude ver. 6.

answer the ends of a state of trial. Every virtue, both active and passive, such as *self-denial*, *fortitude*, *benevolence*, *charity*, *compassion*, and the like, have now room for exercise; which they would not in a state of perfect ease and tranquillity. Together with abstinence from sensual pleasure, to which nature carries us with violence, commonly stil'd *temperance*; we are to manifest a becoming *patience* and *resignation* in bearing pain, and sorrow, and affliction; and to practise constancy and resolution in both. There is therefore a great deal of truth and good sense in that saying of * *Lactantius*, one of the *fathers* of the christian church, "that God has contrived a most admirable work. Having created an infinite multitude of souls, which by uniting to weak and frail bodies, he has placed in the middle between good and evil; hereby proposing virtue to beings composed of different natures; to the end they might not with ease and delicacy obtain immortality, but arrive at the unspeakable reward of eternal life with very great labour and difficulty." In the room of a *positive* command, by which the obedience of our first parents was tried, the trial of mankind at present turns upon the good government of the appetites and passions of their own nature, which

* *Lact. Divine Institut.* l. 7. cap. 5.

which are not so easily managed as those of *Adam* before his fall. The great question now is which we will prefer, *obedience to God*, or a state of *subjection* to our *bodily* appetites and passions? to follow *reason* or *inclination*? *present* pleasure or *future* happiness? whether we will chuse virtue and religion with all the disadvantages attending them; or, to express it more properly, the pure manly and inward delights of virtue and a good conscience, as more valuable than the base gratifications of sin; and serve God faithfully and perseveringly, and continue to put our trust in his providential care and remunerative goodness, under all the troubles of the present life, and notwithstanding the seeming confusion and disorder of things? Now these are very important ends, and all these ends are *visibly* answered by that state of *vanity* and corruption to which man is now subject: and this is a very good reason why a most wise and good God should permit such a state of things.

4. GOD *suits* his government of man, and *dealings* with him, to the *state* he is now in. If he has *given less* to the *posterity* of *fallen* man, than he did to their *first* parents, he *requires less* of them. Of our first parents he required *perfection*, of us only *sincerity*.
 " *He knoweth our frame, and remembreth we*

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are but dust: we are frail mutable creatures, who have little strength but in our passions; exceeding prone to mistake and to go astray. He who is our Maker and our Judge mercifully considers this, making answerable *abate-ments* as to the *terms* of acceptance on the one hand, and answerable *additions* of *assistance* and *encouragement* on the other. If we are *prone* to offend, he does not cast us off for one or two offences, or for never so great a number, if we truly repent of them, and sincerely endeavour to do his will. He renews his forgiving mercy, and upon our return to him not only pardons, but abundantly rewards us. ^w *He restores our souls, and leads us in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* Are we weak? he knows it, and expects no more from us than he hath *given* us; or, upon our humble application to him, *will give* us strength to perform. And what reason have we then to complain? no man is under a *necessity* of perishing; nay, no man perisheth but thro' his own inexcusable folly and fault. That *sincerity* which is the condition of the divine favour consists not in any particular *heights* of virtue, to which only a few have any opportunity of attaining; but in a faithful and honest improvement of those abilities, and means, and helps, and encouragements, which men *severally*

severally have, whether greater or less. And to say that there are any to whom this sincerity is *impossible*, is an express contradiction; it being the same as saying, that some men are not *able* to do so much as they *can* do: I mean *morally* speaking, or so as to be *inexcusable* if they *neglect* doing it; which they would not be, if it was *morally*, not to say *naturally* impossible for them to do what God requires of them.

5. THERE is this advantage in the present state, as a state of *vanity* and *corruption*, that it carries in it a *continual admonition* to turn our thoughts and affections towards a *better state*, and to be more diligent in our *preparations* for it. This certainly is the use we ought to make of the vanity of *all things under the sun*; and 'tis really wonderful how we can avoid making it. The reflection is so obvious, that I believe it hardly escapes any who make use of their reasoning faculties. Is there no such thing as happiness *here*? the inference from hence is, that I ought to look out for it *elsewhere*. Is there no carrying virtue to any great height of excellence in the *present state*? is it very imperfect in the *best of men*? undoubtedly then this life is only a passage or introduction to *another*; and it must be every man's wisdom to set more light by this vain life, and all the enjoyments of it, and to endeavour to secure a better

and more permanent existence. And since this reflection is so easily made, whence is it that men so seldom act upon it? that they see the truth, their true interest and happiness, unless they wilfully shut their eyes; and yet chuse in their practice to give themselves up to the conduct of error and delusion? For this no apology can be made, and 'tis very happy that notwithstanding the multitude of those who *follow after lies*, there are some who reason and who act better. To add no more,

6. WE may reasonably conceive God has the rather chosen the present scheme of things, because hereby he has an opportunity of dispensing his *justice* and *bounty* in *two* the most remarkable acts of *providence* which occur in his dealings with mankind: his *justice* in punishing the sin of the *first Adam* with the loss of immortality to himself, and all his descendants; his bounty in rewarding the *obedience unto death* of the *second Adam*, with the restoration of life to all, and of a blessed and glorious immortality to all those who do not render themselves absolutely unworthy of it. This opposition of the *first* and *second Adam* in respect of *disobedience* and *obedience*, and parallel between them with regard to the *universal* effects of the one and of the other, is insisted upon by the apostle *Paul*, particularly in *Rom. v.* where he stiles the
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the first man *the figure of him who was to come*, adding among other things, that as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. And in his first epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xv. he has these words, as by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead; for as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. Now these two great events, the loss of immortality by the first man, and recovery of it by the second, who is the Lord from heaven, are very instructive. The one is an instance of the displeasure of God against sin, and a warning not wilfully to disobey the divine commands: the other as illustrious an example of God's great regard to virtue and obedience, which he rewards so liberally in his Son; and consequently a most powerful motive and encouragement to struggle thro' all the opposition we can meet with in the cause of virtue, and in the trial of our obedience, when we know it shall be so amply rewarded—Let this finish the third head, that *mankind* were originally brought into *subjection* to the present state of *vanity* and corruption, not by *themselves* but by *another*. In considering which I have endeavoured to vindicate the *justice*, and *wisdom*, and *goodness* of God in this *dispensation* of his providence. Let us now proceed to the

IV. *Proposition.* IN this state of *vanity*, under which the whole moral creation or world of *mankind groaneth* and *travaileth* in pain together, the human race has an *earnest expectation* or *desire* of a condition more *perfect* and happy. If we speak of that *particular* state of happiness which is revealed in the *gospel*, and there declared to be reserved for good men in another life; then there must be something of a *figure* in the expression, that *the earnest expectation* of the reasonable creature *waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God*; the thing intended being only to express the great *desirableness* of this blessed state; it not being very unusual to describe what is in *itself* extreamly *desirable*, as if it were *actually desired*. Thus the *Messiah*, that wonderful person who was to be the *universal restorer* of the human race, is called by one of the prophets * *the desire of all nations*; because all nations were in great want of such a person, and must therefore have earnestly desired his coming, if they had been acquainted with it, as the *Jews* were, and been justly sensible of the wretched condition into which they were fallen. In like manner, the happiness of the future state *brought to light by the gospel*, is so transcendently great, that all intelligent creatures, had they such a blessed state propounded to their hopes

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* Hag. ii. 7.

hopes as it is to ours, and considered it as they ought, must needs have strong desires after it excited. If on the other hand we understand what is here said of a future happiness only *in general* of the *perfection* of the human nature, and a state of immortality; then 'tis most certain, without a figure, that mankind do *naturally* desire it. For,

I. ALL creatures *naturally* tend to their *perfection*, so does the race of mankind in particular; and the future state of the saints in the text, stil'd the *manifestation of the sons of God*, importing the highest perfection to which the nature of man can be advanced; with the greatest propriety, men who are reasonable creatures, and breathe after immortality, may be said to *wait* for such a state, tho' they are far from having a distinct idea of it. There are in all, even the lowest and most ignorant minds, secret *tendencies* and *aspirations* after a state of things more suitable to the dignity of their reasonable and spiritual nature. They are uneasy and dissatisfied in their present situation, dissatisfied with themselves, and with their condition, to both which they are sensible a great deal is wanting; tho' *what* it is, they hardly know or seriously consider. They have a natural consciousness that *all* is not as it *should* be, and as it might be. 'Tis an impression from the Deity upon the soul of man, which is his offspring.

offspring. An inward whisper of the omnipresent Spirit to the spirits imprisoned in bodies; that they might not wholly forget their original, and being wandered from the fountain of their existence, and center of their felicity, settle in such an unnatural state. This is the chief reason of men's being so much given to change: no wonder they change, when they find not in any, or in all their earthly enjoyments, that which without knowing it they are seeking after. Were they arrived at their proper *center*, they would *rest*: but they are at a great distance from it; as an effect and sign of which they are perpetually rolling from object to object. These are as it were the *groans* of the reasonable creation, with *painful struggles* endeavouring, like a *woman in labour*, to be delivered of its present burden. Men were made for a state of greater perfection, and for an immortal existence, and therefore cannot but desire it. They might as easily put off the desire of happiness in general, as of perfection and immortality; since a man cannot enjoy the happiness of a *man*, unless his condition be more perfect than at present; his faculties made perfect like his condition; and each of these secured to him, not for a few days or years, but *for ever*. There is a strange *greatness* in the soul of man, which is the ground of his not being contented with *little* things; he

he aims at greatness, tho' he generally mistakes in his notion of it. The desires of the soul are boundless, not all *earthly*, nay, not all *created* things together can match them. Hence they are ever in motion till they find their proper object.

2. IN *proportion* as any of the sons of men have *improved* their rational faculties, and *lived up* to the *light* they have enjoyed; this *desire* of perfection and happiness has been more *ardent* and more *explicit*. They have clearly perceived that the human soul was capable of being very much advanced above its present pitch, with regard to knowledge and virtue, and consequently in happiness. And, together with their notions of these things, their desires after them have enlarged. They have seen the emptiness of all earthly enjoyments, have been convinced that their happiness consisted not in these; have expressed a noble disdain and contempt of worldly riches and honours, and placed their felicity in the possessions and qualities of the *mind*. This, I say, has been always the case. The desire of immortality, in all those who have attentively considered, and wisely complied with the design of it, has had a very good effect, exciting to lead a virtuous and religious life; being sensible that immortality *alone* was not desirable, but immortality of *happiness*; and that the immortal hap-
piness

piness of such a creature as man can never be attained without the right use of his faculties, which is the same thing as *virtue* and *religion*. And as this desire of perfection and immortality has had a favourable influence upon a life of virtue, so a life of virtue has had the same cherishing influence upon this desire; so that according as the virtuous dispositions have thrived, this generous desire has sprung up with them, like a plant of congenial nature, and become more strong. The *better* any man is, the *better* he is *fitted* for the proper felicity of a reasonable creature; a felicity adapted to the best part of his nature, and to which the inferior animal part is a constant hindrance; a felicity of which he has some *idea*, but hardly any *enjoyment* in this life. This idea of a higher kind of life, these beginnings and presages of it, in the relishes of true goodness, and in the ascent of the soul to God, and endeavours to know and resemble him more, enkindle the most earnest longings after it. The good man dreads the thought of death's being like drawing the curtain between him and all farther prospects of God and things divine, of truth and happiness: and that the seeds of knowledge and goodness which are sown in him, and which with a great deal of labour, and some little success, he has cultivated, and which begin to show

show themselves, to bud and blossom, shall be nipp'd at once by death's cold blasts, and quite destroyed; or even that they should not be improved to a much higher degree: I say, the virtuous man dreads this thought, being so directly contrary to the main stream of his desires. He would not have his soul confined, and fettered, and bowed down, as now it is; mocked with shadows of truth, and unsubstantial images of good, and able very imperfectly to practise that virtue which is the foundation of the truest contentment, and most lasting satisfaction of mind. Such is the state of mankind, especially of the *virtuous* part of them; under the vanity and imperfection of the present life, they have an earnest expectation or desire of one more perfect and happy.

V. MEN have not been without the *hope* of such a happy alteration in their state, which in the *text* is expressly *asserted* and *promised*. After these words, *The creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly*, it is immediately added, *but by reason of him who subjected the same in hope*: these last words, *in hope*, may be connected with the verb *waiteth*, in the 19th verse. *The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God in hope*; or with the immediate antecedent, *him that subjected*
the

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the same in hope; if by *him* that subjected
man to vanity, we understand *God himself*.
I shall consider the hope here mentioned
in each of these views, and then show how,
by the *gospel* revelation, this *hope* is improved
into *assurance*.

I. MANKIND have *always* been possessed
with the *hope* of a better state of things than
the present. They have not only *desired* it,
but *hoped* for it. Now hope implies some
degree of belief that the thing desired will
come to pass. And such a belief of a future
state, in which all the virtuous and good
shall be much happier than they are, or are
capable of being in this imperfect and va-
riable life, has obtained in all ages and na-
tions, more especially among those who
have any way excelled in knowledge and vir-
tue. For such as these it is almost as natu-
ral to *hope* for a state of happiness after this
life, as it is to desire it; finding in them-
selves some good disposition for it. Nay, it
is natural for all, without exception, to hope
for future happiness, tho' not *immediately*,
yet more *remotely*; that is, to believe that
there is such a state reserved for those who
practise righteousness; and then to hope,
that however unqualified for it they are at
present, they shall however finally attain to
it: being willing to persuade themselves,
they shall not always live as they do now,
but

but one time or other follow the precepts of virtue, and thereby prepare themselves for the rewards of another life.

2. GOD has given men some ground for this *hope*: tho' he was pleased to permit sin, suffering, imperfection, and death to come into the world by the *first man's offence*, yet it was not without opening a prospect of a more agreeable state of things to follow. To this effect was the very *first promise* after the *fall*, when sentence was passed both upon the *deceived* and the *deceiver*: that ^y the *seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head*. A great person was to arise of the *woman's seed*, who should restore this lapsed race of creatures, and recover all which they had lost. And it is very remarkable, that the * tradition of this intended Deliverer has not been quite lost in the heathen world, where a notion of a three-fold state of man, (the *primeval*, from which man is fallen; his *present* degenerate state; and the *final*, or state of *restoration*) has prevailed and been conveyed from nation to nation, and from age to age. Nay, and which is more, the current belief has been, that this glorious revolution was to be effected by the *mediation* of a being of a rank and order *superior* to man. As the God of the christians is the *unknown* God

^y Gen. iii. 15. * See Ramfay's *Disc. on Theol. and Mythol. of the heathen*.

God of the *heathen*, the God whom they *ignorantly worshipped* under a great many fictions and disguises; so the Redeemer of the *christians* may be stiled the *unknown Saviour* of the *pagan* world, of whom they had an obscure idea, and whom they looked for and celebrated, and *ignorantly* called *Mythras*, *Brama*, and the like. But besides this first promise, God, as the God of nature, the Author of reason, and the Governour of the world by his universal providence, has encouraged men to hope they shall, some time or other, be freed from that vanity and corruption to which in this mortal state they are subjected. And this hope is better fitted to support the mind, and to answer its end as a motive to a life of virtue, than the other which is only founded in an obscure prediction, being more strong and clear. By the large capacities and faculties of the human soul, to which the things of this world bear no manner of proportion, and which, in our present circumstance, have not an opportunity to unfold and shew themselves, God plainly points us to another life; where all who behave well in the state of trial, shall attain to much higher degrees of perfection and happiness. And then by his *goodness* displayed in the works of *creation*, and in the course of his *providence*, he farther *confirms* these hopes, and in a kind of universal language

language *speaks* thus to every man, *If thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted?* Farther, many thinking men among the *beathen*, considering the deplorable state of ignorance, superstition and vice, into which mankind are so generally sunk, and having experienced the insufficiency of natural reason to raise them out of this state, have been inclined to believe that a *revelation* would sometime or other be vouchsafed to the world; and the will of God, as the rule of our duty, and the ground of our expectations, be thus more universally and more certainly known: which hope they derived also from their *natural* notions of the *goodness* of God, which not a little countenance it. But,

3. *THIS hope* is raised into *assurance* by the *christian revelation*. The text, in so many words, asserts, *That the creature shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God.* The principal and most direct meaning of these words may be this, that “the *beathen*” world should have deliverance from their “unhappy state by being made *christian*,” which has been in part, and very remarkably too, accomplished already by the general publication of the gospel, “*preached*, according to St. Paul’s expression, to every

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creature

creature under heaven. The design of the gospel was *universal* deliverance, and it was, in fact, carried into the *greater* part of the *then* known world: as we believe, (being led thereto by scripture prophecy) that the time will come, when *christianity* shall be the religion of the *world*, triumphing over every thing which opposes its progress. The reasonable creation is already in *part*, and we have ground to believe shall be farther *delivered* from the *bondage of corruption* by the enjoyment of the doctrine, and the means of a blessed immortality. But tho' this seems the primary meaning of the words, yet I cannot think but they have a *farther* design, to denote the benefit which *all* mankind, without exception, have, by the *mediation* of Christ; who being characterised by this title of the *seed of the woman*, is a benefactor to *all* her descendants, *i. e.* to the whole race of mankind, and is therefore represented as *the desire of all nations*, and the person in whom ^a *all the families of the earth should be blessed*; as ^b *the mediator between God and man*, and ^c *the saviour of the world*. We know that there will be a *resurrection* of *all* men, and that it is owing to him as the ^d *second Adam*; and if a resurrection, then a *happy* one of all who

^a Gen. xii. 3.^b 1 Tim. ii. 5.^c John iv. 42.^d 1 Cor. xv, 22, 45.

who have *feared God, and wrought righteousness*, according to the *dispensations* of religion under which they have lived.

THIS may suffice to have been said on the several parts of my subject, which I will conclude with a short application.

I. LET this lead us into *proper reflections* on the nature of man, and of his present condition, and *excite* in us *affections* and *purposes* *suitable* to such reflections. The nature of man is sunk from his original dignity: what we see at present is in some sense little more than the *ruins* of a noble structure. Indeed according to the account given of the original of mankind by the *Epicureans*, and by modern *infidels* their disciples and successors, the human race is much more perfect than it was in its beginning. For as they represent the matter, men and all other animals springing out of the earth by chance, or without the will and direction of a wise maker; man was at first but one degree removed from the beasts of the field, and was not, till after many ages, refined and improved into the being he now is. But as the light of reason affords a manifest conviction of the absurdity of this notion, that the world is only the effect of blind chance; so the same reason has taught the more thinking part of the *heathen* to believe, that the souls of men are much degenerated

from their primitive state. It must be confessed they had no clear and just conceptions of this matter, for want of revelation, and therefore had recourse to a state of *pre-existence*; wherein they imagined the souls of men to have enjoyed higher degrees of perfection and happiness, than they did after their descent into earthly bodies. Now tho' this doctrine of *pre-existence* be an error, yet 'tis an error built upon a most certain truth, that man is *fallen* from his *primitive* excellency. And as man *himself*, so the *condition* of man in this world is very imperfect. He is vain, *and he walketh in a vain show*. There is little real and substantial in any of his enjoyments; but then under all this vanity and imperfection, there are desires and hopes of better things to come. And by the way, this endeavour of the human soul, like fire to ascend unto a higher sphere, is a plain confutation of the atheistical opinion, which shuts up the existence of man with the present life, and will not allow of a better state of things either *past* or *future*. We should acknowledge the goodness of God to us as we are men, reasonable and free beings, in giving us those *natural hints* of our superiority to all things under the sun, and our being made for nobler and more durable objects. Let us, considering the vanity of the present state, on account of the imperfection

and

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and fleeting duration of all things in it, be persuaded to remove our affections from these things. We find this is not a state in which we are to take up our rest; that 'tis indeed a state wherein 'tis impossible true rest and satisfaction should ever be found; and why then should we seek them here? why are we so very little the wiser and better for *experience*, not our own only, but of all mankind in all ages? If reason fail of convincing men, yet one would think constant and universal experience should not. There cannot be greater folly than that of which we are guilty, in cherishing great expectations from this vain and transitory state of things. Alas! 'tis not in these to fill up the *void* within, to stop our inquiring souls, and persuade them to sit down and think themselves compleatly happy. One of the most likely things to promote our happiness in this world, is not to look for happiness while we are in it; to disengage our minds and hearts more entirely from it: for as by this means we should cut off the greater part of those disappointments which now create us so much vexation; so when we had drawn off our desires and hopes from all false objects, we should be more likely to fix them upon the true; and the consequence of this would be, that we should have more satisfaction of mind than we pos-

sibly can while we continue wandering after an imaginary felicity.

2. LET what we have heard *raise* our *value* for the *gospel* of *Christ*. We are to be thankful for our *natural hopes*, but *especially* for those which we derive from the *gospel revelation*; which are at once the *strongest*, the most *extensive*, and the most *satisfying*. The light of the *gospel* is what we cannot prize too highly. We have not a mere *glimpse* of future good things, and of that *glorious liberty* into which we shall be recovered at last, if we do not voluntarily chuse a state of servitude to sin and corruption; but we have the *brightest* and the most *certain* prospect of it, enough to excite all the desires of our souls, and engage us ^f *by a patient continuance in well-doing, to seek for glory, honour and immortality*; well knowing that upon this condition we shall finally receive *eternal life*, ^f *thro' Jesus Christ our Lord*. We who are privileged with the *gospel revelation* should *live* more by *faith*. If we believe the *gospel*, we cannot but believe a state of transcendent glory and felicity beyond this; the *gospel* being intirely founded upon the doctrine of such a future blessed state. And that we believe the *gospel*, sincerely and stedfastly believe it, I take for granted. And do we believe ^g *that there*

^f • Rom. ii. 7.

iv. 9.

^f Rom. vi. 23.

^g Heb.

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there remaineth a rest for the people of God, a
state entirely exempt from that vanity which
is mixed with the present? and why then
should not this belief direct all our pursuits,
animate all our powers, and govern all our
actions? To *believe* another world, and to
act as if we did *not* believe it, is a sort of
conduct, which can never be reconciled to
common sense and reason. If there are
goods infinitely preferable to those of this
world, it is but fit they should have the pre-
ference. Together with the contempt of all
vain and transitory enjoyments, we should
labour to increase in ourselves the esteem
and hope of these heavenly things. We are
inexcusable if we do not. An *earthly-minded*
christian is an *inconsistent* character. Nay
so would such a christian be (if such a case
can be supposed) who was *alike indifferent*
to the happiness of the next world, and of
this too. Could such a case be supposed,
that a man might have a right notion of the
emptiness of all earthly things, and heartily
despise them, but at the same time have no
desire of the happiness which the gospel pro-
poses, tho' he believed the reality of it, and
take no care to secure it; such a character
and behaviour as this, would in some sense
be more absurd than that of the earthly-
minded man, who labours for happiness
tho' he mistake in his idea of it: whereas

the other is supposed to sit down contented, if it may be so expressed, without any hope of happiness at all, either in this world, or another; tho' he believe there is another world, and that he may be happy therein, while the nature of present enjoyments will not allow of his being happy in this. Can there be greater folly than this? My friends, let our *faith* be a *vigorous* principle of action in our souls. Let it excite and assist us to shake off our sloth and indolence, and to apply in earnest to a life of piety and holiness, which is the only preparation for the blessedness of heaven. Forasmuch as ^h *life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel*, we should love and value the gospel upon this account; and for the sake of the doctrine and promise of immortality, which the gospel holds forth to us, should yield the more chearful obedience to all its holy precepts. We are *strangers* and *pilgrims* in this world, where we are bewildered among a thousand vain objects. We know that we are not at home in our own country, but how to find our way thither without some assistance we know not: and is not the direction which the gospel affords us exceeding seasonable, and should it not be as welcome as it is seasonable? Here we have a lovely *map* of our *heavenly* country, and the road leading

leading to it is plainly marked ; so plainly, that, unless wilfully, we cannot err therein. What an advantage this ! the more we consider it, the more thankful we shall be for it. And which is more, we shall express the value we have for the gospel, on account of its having revealed and promised a blessed immortality ; and our thankfulness to God for so great a privilege, by yielding the most chearful, the most universal, the most constant obedience to its holy precepts. Let the precepts of the gospel be never so strict, the happiness promised by the gospel will make sufficient amends for it. Strict as they are, they are no more than necessary by way of preparation for a state of immortality and glory. We may as well quarrel with our way, when it is the *straitest* and *shortest* which can be to our end, and refuse to walk in it, because it is not so pleasant as we fancy it ought to be ; tho' in any other way we shall never arrive to the place at which we aim. The more holy and heavenly the precepts of the gospel, so much the better suited are they to the nature of the saints future felicity. That is holy and heavenly ; and do we find fault with the means, for no other reason but because they are agreeable to their end ? *ⁱ Having this hope in us, let us be persuaded to purify ourselves thereby,*
even

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even

ⁱ 1 John iii. 3.

even as God; the great object of the heavenly blessedness, and as every thing which is an ingredient in that happiness, and every person who is to be our companion in it, are pure; ^k let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God, and in the hope of this most glorious and eternal recompence of reward.

^k 2 Cor. vii. 1.





S E R M O N VI.

God's Command to *Abraham* to offer his son, and his intention to obey, vindicated.

GEN. XXii. 1, 2.

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham. And he said, behold here I am. And he said, take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

WE read of our blessed Saviour, ^a *that he was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which should be spoken against; that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed: i. e. the infidelity of some, notwithstanding the abundant means of conviction afforded them, and the*

^a Luke ii. 34.

the *readiness* of others to *receive the truth in the love of it*, would plainly discover the different tempers of mind by which they were governed. Agreeably hereto, it may be observed, concerning several parts of the scripture-revelation, that, either from the nature of the things treated in them, or the manner and circumstances of expressing them, men of *corrupt* minds have taken occasion to call in question, if not openly deny, the Divine authority of the sacred records. And this God has wisely permitted; *that^b they who are approved persons of a good and honest heart, who examine fairly, and judge uprightly, might be made manifest.* One very remarkable instance of this kind is, the trial of *Abraham's* faith, of which we have an account in the chapter whence my text is taken. Any one, not apt to start difficulties where there are none, or to magnify every little difficulty into an unanswerable objection, would look upon the relation given of this transaction as exceeding instructive, and think the writer to the *Hebrews* had made the right use of it, who recommends this good man, in his behaviour upon this occasion, as a most illustrious *example of faith* in God, and *resignation* to his will. By *faith*, Abraham, *when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he who had received the promises, offered up his only-begotten*

^b 1 Cor. xi. 19.

^c Heb. xi. 17.

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begotten son. This, no doubt, was a very *difficult* thing to *perform*; but why it should be thought such a *difficulty* to *believe* the account which the scripture gives of this matter, I cannot imagine; and much less can I apprehend, what should make it appear such an *absurdity* to any, as some have been pleased to represent it: who will needs have it to be a thing *incredible*, that God should be the *author* of such a *command*; and inconceivable, how any *wise* and *good* man should *believe* that he was, and prepare himself to *obey* it. For which reason I shall,

I. ENDEAVOUR to *vindicate* this part of the scripture history from the *objections* which have been raised against it. And then proceed,

II. To show the *wise designs* of *providence*, answered by God's trying the *father of the faithful* in the manner here related.

I. My first business is to *vindicate* this part of the scripture history from the *objections* which have been raised against it; which I am inclined to think may be done without much difficulty, to the satisfaction of all serious and impartial persons.

I take it for granted, that no one sticks at the expression of *God's tempting Abraham*; by which it is evident, nothing more is understood,

derstood, than his putting the virtue and piety of that good man to the *trial*. In the sense that the apostle ^e *James* meant, it is most true, that as *God cannot be tempted with evil, so he tempteth no man*. It is true, the circumstances into which he puts men, may be the occasion of their doing a great many bad things; but then his *design* in putting them into such circumstances, is not that they should do such actions, and thereby give him a handle for punishing them, as if he delighted in their sin and misery; but he does it for other ends, and particularly that they may have an opportunity to *approve* their obedience and fidelity to him, under the greatest temptations to the contrary: which shews God's tempting men to be quite *another* thing from what is meant by the *temptations* of the *devil*, which are always aimed at the *ruin* of mankind. This being briefly premised, I now come to *consider* the *objections* which may seem to lie against this part of sacred writ, under these two heads; as respecting *Abraham's behaviour* on this occasion, and the *part ascribed* to God in this matter.

I. As to *Abraham's behaviour*, the charge brought against him amounts to this, that he was much *too hasty*: first, in *believing* that such a command as this could come from God;

^e James i. 13.

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God; and then, in his *preparations* to obey it. The *first* article of the charge, if true, will prove him not to have been so *cautious* and *prudent* as he ought; the *second*, that he was *wanting* in *tenderness* and *compassion* to his son. Let us examine each of these articles distinctly.

I. IT is alledged, that *Abraham* was *too hasty*, in *believing* such a command as this to come from God; of which, upon due reflection, he might have been convinced, that God could not possibly be the author. But, what if he had no *just* grounds to *question* this? nay, what if it was not properly in his *power* to do it? The first of these two suppositions is *certain*, and the other not altogether *improbable*. I say, that *Abraham* had no *just* ground to question God's being the author of this command is *certain*: God, before this, had revealed himself to *Abraham*, at *sundry times*, and in *divers manners*. When he first called him out of ^f *Ur* of the *Chaldees*; then when he *dwelt* in ^g *Charran*; ^h afterwards, when he had passed through the land of *Canaan*; after that, ⁱ when *Lot* separated from him; then again, ^k after the *rescue* of *Lot*; ^l another time, when he *instituted circumcision*, as the token of the covenant between them; and ^m yet again,

^f Gen. xij. 1. ^g xii. 4. ^h xii. 7. ⁱ xiii. 14.
^k xv. 1. ^l xvii. 1. ^m xviii. 1.

again, when he gave him assurance of the birth of *Isaac*, and acquainted him with the intended destruction of *Sodom*: he revealed himself by *dreams*, by *visions*, by a voice from *heaven*, by *angelical* messengers, by a *sensibly* glory: and that these were *divine* revelations, he knew by the circumstances attending them, *viz. miracles*, and the *accomplishment* of *predictions*. The birth of *Isaac* was both these in one: it was a *miracle*, because he was born when his parents were *past the age* of having children; and it was the *fulfilling* of a *prediction*, being at the same time of which God had spoken unto him. So that, before this command was given, there was an established friendship and familiarity between the Almighty and his favourite servant; and God was as well known to *Abraham*, as a man can be to his most intimate acquaintance. And therefore, when *after all these things*, God comes to *Abraham*, and calling him by his name, requires him to sacrifice his son; *Abraham* certainly could know whether it was a revelation from God. And if it be thought, that how much soever it might *resemble* the *usual* manner of God's manifesting himself to him, he ought to have *suspected* it for a *delusion* of some *evil* spirit; it may be answered, that tho' perhaps it might *not be impossible* for an *evil* spirit to *imitate* the true God, by doing
all

all that God is said to have done, when he revealed himself to *Abraham*; yet *Abraham* might justly conclude it to be *inconsistent* with the *honour* of God, to *permit* a wicked spirit to personate him after this manner, and to *counterfeit* his *letters patent*, in order to impose upon one of his most faithful servants, and devout worshippers. Indeed, had it been evident to the reason of *Abraham*, that to *permit* such an imposture, was not so *unworthy* of God, as it was to *lay* such a command upon him to offer up his son; he might then have been sure, that the command was not from God; as he might also, if the command had been apparently inconsistent with the promise of a posterity to descend from *Isaac*: but that neither of these was the case will be shewn presently, when I come to consider the part which God is represented to have had in this affair. It does not yet appear then, that *Abraham* had any *just ground* to question the truth of the revelation. And what if it should be added, that it was not *properly* in his *power* to do it? This is not an impossible supposition, that there might be such a *strong impression* made upon his *mind*, and his thoughts be so *irresistibly* directed and influenced, that he should not be able to doubt of the reality of the command. I fancy no one will dispute this being a *possible* thing with God: and if

the trial had nothing in it contrary to any of the perfections of God, but served several wise and good ends, which will be afterwards proved; then it is not altogether *improbable* that this method was taken: I mean, that besides the usual ways of God's discovering himself to *Abraham*, he immediately impress'd his mind, and represented the thing to him after such a manner, as to work in him a full conviction that God himself was the author of the command. The command was in itself so *shocking*, that it will not be absurd to suppose, that God would leave *no other* difficulty in *Abraham's* way, but that of *resolving* to obey it; and not put him to the trouble of satisfying himself without any assistance, that it was the command of God. And therefore if God did not keep objections out of his thoughts, he might yet direct him to the right way of answering them, and at the same time produce an internal acquiescence which removed every doubt. That this was *actually* the case I will not affirm; 'tis enough that it is possible to have been so, and that consequently we ought to conclude, that it really was, rather than to impute a criminal *credulity* to a person as eminent for wisdom as he was for his piety.

2. THE other objection against *Abraham* is, that he was *too hasty* in his *preparations* to obey

obey this *strange* command ; hereby discovering a *want* of those *affections* which human nature is seldom without, even in the worst of men. Was he so *importunate* for the pardon of an *inhospitable*, *impious*, and *debauched* city ? would he by his entreaties have with-held the fiery tempest from falling upon *guilty Sodom* ? and had he not a *word* to offer in behalf of his *innocent* son ? not the least *expostulation* with God against making a burnt-offering of him, and much more against his being the *priest*, who was at the same time the *parent* too ? has not this a very odd appearance ? It may, to those who do not rightly consider it : but let us see what may be answered. We may

1. MAKE this use of *Abraham's readiness* to comply with this difficult command, to infer his being entirely satisfied that it was the order of heaven ; for if he had seen the least room for evasion, he would have delayed doing as he was enjoined, and have begged of God not to suffer him to be deluded in a matter that so nearly affected them both. And then,

2. As to the want of natural affection of which *Abraham* is accused, the accusation is manifestly unjust ; this very circumstance of the strong and peculiar *affection* he had to his son, being mentioned in the command itself, as that which would render the virtue of his obedience most con-

spicuous. *Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest*: so that here is the testimony of God himself, that *Isaac* was *Abraham's* most beloved son. And indeed the thing speaks itself, that a person who discovered so much humanity in his intercession for a most wicked people, could be no stranger to the tender emotions of nature in favour of a son, and of such a son too, the *only* son of his mother, *Abraham's* son by his beloved wife, and a son of very amiable qualities and great accomplishments. It is impossible that a man of *Abraham's* character could want affection to such a son: but then his love and devotedness to God were *greater*, than his affection to his son. And this was the very reason why he would not so much as seem to dispute the divine command; that he might approve this superiority of his love to God, by his readiness to make such a sacrifice of his very nature to him. And it is a little unhappy for the objectors, that they should reproach *Abraham* with the readiness of his obedience, which was the very thing that most of all commended it. 'Tis not unlikely that one reason of God's communicating to *Abraham* his intention to destroy *Sodom*, was to try his humanity and benevolence; or that he might have an opportunity to prove his regard to the happiness of his fellow-creatures, and compassion to the

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the worst of men ; which he did by repeating and urging his intercession for them, and using all the interest he had in his Almighty friend in their behalf. But the thing designed to be tried by the command to offer up his son, was not *his love to his son*, which did not need any trial ; but his *intire resignation of himself*, and *all that he had unto God* : of *himself* I say, for in sacrificing his son, *Abraham* would in effect have sacrificed himself ; and therefore had he desired to be excused, and made use of a great deal of expostulation, he might have seemed to have done it, not so much for his son's sake, as for his own. Besides which, it is to be considered, that he knew the destruction of *Sodom* was the punishment of their wickedness, and would have been final, for which reason he would willingly have kept it off ; whereas his *son* being innocent, he knew it was not in any displeasure against him, that God required this sacrifice, and consequently, that he who required it, as he was able to make up the loss to both, would certainly do it, insomuch that his son, as well as he himself, should be a gainer in the end. Let me farther observe, that the behaviour of *Isaac*, when his father proceeded to bind him, and lay him upon the altar, shows the weakness and injustice of both these objections against *Abraham*. For surely *Isaac*,

who was now in the strength and vigour of youth, the darling of his parents, and heir to great possessions, cannot be suspected to have no love to himself, and no value for his life? and yet from his conduct, this might as well be objected to him, as want of evidence or natural affection to *Abraham*. We don't find him to have made the least opposition to his father's binding him, or to have used any one argument to divert him from his purpose, and to preserve himself. And why did he not? but because he *knew* that his father acted by the express command of God: and being persuaded of this, he thought the more chearfully he offered himself to the stroke, the greater would the glory be of his obedience; both to God, and to his earthly parent. And upon much the same considerations as *Isaac* forbore pleading for *himself*, *Abraham* was *restrained* from pleading for *him*. The truth of the command being indisputable, he would do nothing that might appear like disputing the *equity* of it. And if it be asked, what evidence *Isaac* had for this command? it may be said, that besides the satisfaction which *Abraham* gave him, it is very probable that there was a *visible glory*, the usual token of the *divine presence*, which rested upon the mountain; and by this both of them were farther confirmed. How else
could

could *Abraham*ⁿ have known it *as far off* to have been the place? since we do not read of his being informed of it any other way than by this sign. *Abraham* then is clear of any just objection against *his* conduct on this remarkable occasion.

LET us therefore in the next place, proceed to examine the objections brought against the sacred history, for the part which it ascribes to *God* in this affair. The aim of the objections is in short, to prove, that *God* could not give such a command; and that therefore the history which represents him as doing it, cannot be true. I shall fully consider these objections, and then leave any impartial person to judge, whether they are of such weight as to be a balance to the evidence we have of the divine authority of the scripture; nay, whether they are sufficient to give the friends to revelation the least just disturbance.

I. IT is objected, that this command could not come from *God*, because *contrary* to the *law of nature*, which forbids *murder*, and makes it *peculiarly* the duty of parents to do their utmost for the *preservation* of their children.

I shall not answer, as some have done, that *God* may *dispense* with his *own* laws; for, tho' the law of nature be the law of

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God

God in this sense, that his *authority* added to it makes it properly a *law*, which has always a respect to the will of a *superior*; yet, in another sense, it is not his law, so as to be a mere *arbitrary* institution of his, alterable at his mere will and pleasure, and proceeding originally and entirely from it. The law of nature is founded in the essential perfections of God, and in the reason and relations of things, and is therefore necessary and immutable. Nothing which makes a part of the law of nature can ever be set aside; neither was it so in the present case. For if we look into the matter a little, what is murder, but the taking away the life of another *unjustly*? not when he, who is the *author* and absolute *proprietor* of life *orders* it to be taken away. And what is it which the relation a father has to his son demands from him? It may be said, that he should *love* his son, in whom he sees himself renewed: very true, but not that he should *love* his son *more* than he loves his God; one who has his being from him, more than he does the *fountain* of his own being. The relation of a *father* does farther demand, that he should, in all *lawful* ways, *guard* that life which he has propagated: true, and only by *such* ways; and therefore not by refusing to do any thing which God commands; which, if it were a possible, nay a probable way

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way of preserving a child, would not be a lawful one. It is questionless the duty of a parent to be solicitous for the happiness of a child; and can he consult it any other way so well as by resigning him up to God? The life of a child is at best only but a *depositum*, or thing committed to the custody of the parent, *lent*, during pleasure, both to parent and child: and therefore God may not only *himself take away* what he *gives* without being questioned for it, but expect that we should *restore* it to him, if he call for it, as he did with regard to *Abraham*. A certain *author* indeed is pleased to say, not a little arrogantly, that had *Abraham* obeyed, the action would have been *abominable* in the eyes of God and man: but how so? when he would have done no more than was his *duty*; nothing which the law of nature forbade; (since that can never forbid a man's sacrificing his own life, or the life of a child, at the command of the author and proprietor of it) in fine, nothing but what his superior obligations to God required from him.

2. IT is objected, the thing was *upon the whole unfit* to be done, i. e. it was unfit for God to *permit* it to be done; and what it was *unfit* for God to *permit*, it could be no way fit for him to *command*. To this I answer, by denying the *consequence*. For tho' the unfitness of the thing to be *executed* should

should be granted (which, for ought I know, may be the truth, since the sacrifice was not actually accomplished, and there never was any human sacrifice offered by divine command) yet its unfitness to be *commanded* does by no means follow, the reason of these two being different. It might not be fit to pass into execution, because inconsistent with the ends of divine government, at the same time that it was fit to be commanded as it served for a *proper trial* of the creature's zeal for God, and submission to him, in the readiness which he discovers to obey. The instance by which this has been illustrated, is not so much amiss as a certain *author* would have it thought. Two women claiming the same child each as her own son, ^a *Solomon* orders the *child to be divided in two*, and that *half should be given to the one, and half to the other*; not designing that this order should be executed, because it was not fit it should be executed: and yet the success of this method, in finding out the true mother of the child, shewed the command to be very fit and expedient. And whereas it hath been said, that God was under no such necessity of trying *Abraham*, in order to *inform himself* how he would act, as *Solomon* was of taking this method to inform himself which of the two women was the real mother;

^a 1 Kings iii. 16.

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mother ; the answer lies very obvious, that tho' the trial of *Abraham* was not necessary upon any such account, yet it might be very useful for other purposes ; and, as I shall show hereafter, was indeed thus useful. But if the action was *not fit* for God to *permit*, how could it be fit for *Abraham* to *intend* and *resolve* to perform it ? and if it was not fit for *Abraham* to intend it, how could God make it his *duty*, and an act of *religion*, to intend and resolve it ? Here, as I apprehend, the difficulty, if there be any, *presses* : to which I would offer this plain solution ; that if *Abraham* had *known* the offering his son to have been an action *unworthy* of God to permit, 'tis not only certain that he *ought not* to have intended and resolved to do it, but that he *could not* have seriously thus resolved : because he might be sure, that the action not being fit to be permitted, God, who is infinitely wise and good, would not permit it ; and knowing before-hand that God would not permit him to sacrifice his son, he could not have intended and resolved to do an action, which, from the beginning, he knew God would not suffer to be done. But it appears from the history, that this was his *real* intention and *full* purpose, he therefore expected no other but that God would have permitted the sacrifice ; and expecting this, he could not but believe that it

was

was consistent with the honour of God to permit it; and *Abraham* having this notion, it was no way unbecoming God as a trial to command him to do it; that is, to make it his *duty* to *intend* and *resolve* the thing, tho' it might have been so to *suffer* the intention and resolution to pass into *act*. From whence I infer, that the author before referred to, had no warrant to be so positive, that no such command was given to *Abraham*; but that he was either deceived, or acted as he did from his own head, and just to give the *heathen* world a proof of his zeal for the God he worshipped. What has been offered does, I think, shew that we are under no necessity of having recourse to such a supposition, which derogates from the credit of the sacred history.

3. IT is pretended that this *story* of *Abraham's* intended sacrifice of his son, gave occasion to that *abominable* custom which afterwards prevailed in several nations, of seeking to *appease* the offended Deity by *human sacrifices*; and that therefore God could not be the author of a command which *tended* to produce such mischievous effects. This is the argument, which is evidently worth nothing, because it supposes the truth of a thing notoriously false, *viz.* that the barbarous custom of sacrificing men *naturally* had its rise from what *Abraham* had done.

It

It may justly be asked, how could this be? If occasion was *taken* from hence, yet how was it *given*? From a sacrifice which was commanded, but not permitted by the Deity commanding it; intended, but not actually performed; it could never come into the heads of any people to argue, that therefore human sacrifices would be acceptable to the Deity, who never commanded but this one, and commanded this *one* only for *trial*, not with a design that it should take effect, as accordingly it did not. This is enough to show, that no occasion for human sacrifices was *given* by this action of *Abraham*; as that alone sufficiently clears the command from this objection against it. Besides which there is *no* evidence, nor the *least* probability in the reason of the thing, that the first occasion of mens offering their fellow-men in sacrifice to God was *taken* from hence. History makes no mention of any such thing; if any such practice had taken its original from hence, it would have been soon after the thing happened; but then the true history of the transaction (or that *Abraham* did not really offer his son in sacrifice) must have been too well known for men to draw a sacrifice barely commanded on God's part, and intended on *Abraham's*, but neither permitted by the first, nor performed by the latter, into an example and justification

cation of sacrifices *actually* made and *without* the authority of divine command. To which this observation may be added, that human sacrifices have obtained in nations, which, 'tis probable, never heard of the name of *Abraham*, or of this tradition concerning him, or not till long enough after this custom was established among them; and this without deriving it from other nations who were first led into it by *Abraham*. The most probable opinion is, that human sacrifices prevailed before the time of *Abraham*, and that one reason of God's commanding this good man to be in a readiness to sacrifice his son, and afterward forbidding it when it came to the execution, was to declare his disapprobation of so inhuman a practice, that the world might see the *true* God was not like the *false* gods of the *heathen*, who were supposed to delight in such sacrifices. Of which more hereafter.

4. IT is objected, here was an *inconsistency* between the *command* and the foregoing *promise*; concerning a posterity by *Isaac*, which may be thought to prove that both could not be from God. It is granted, the revelations of God, who is the fountain of *truth*, can never clash with one another, the commands among themselves, or with his promises; since two contradictory propositions can never be both right and true. But wherein does this inconsistency lie? is it in this,

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this, that the promise to *Abraham* is express, *that in Isaac his seed should be called*, which could not be, if he had no children to succeed to the inheritance? He had no child at that time, and therefore must have died childless if he had been sacrificed by his father as he intended; and what then had become of the promise? To say that the command not being executed, there was no real disagreement between that and the promise, does not entirely remove the difficulty, since that was *more* than *Abraham* could foresee, when he received the command; on the contrary, he proceeded on the supposition that it would: how then could he reconcile in his own thoughts the command with the promised blessing? or how, till these were reconciled to *Abraham's* apprehension, could God expect it from him that he should sacrifice his son? The writer to the *Hebrews* supplies us with a very satisfactory answer: ° *That he accounted, or reasoned thus with himself, that God was able to raise him up even from the dead, from whence also he had received him in a figure.* He considered that *Isaac's* birth was almost as *miraculous* as a *resurrection*, and in some sort like it, since he *sprung from one that was as good as dead*: and therefore, if his son's life was taken from him at the command of God, he who gave life at first in so surprizing a manner, could restore it again, and

and would do it, rather than falsify his promise : and this reasoning made him perfectly easy. Whether this thought was the pure result of his own unassisted reflections, or was first suggested by *inspiration*, we cannot be certain ; tho' it is likely enough, the first hint of this might proceed from the workings of his own thoughts : however that be, this seems clear, that as the reasoning is altogether just, so if it had not offered itself to the patriarch's mind in debating the matter, God could, and would have put it into his thoughts, that his way might be plain before him, and he might have no reason to decline obeying the divine command ; as he would have had if the command and the promise had appeared absolutely inconsistent. So far then, the objections alledged against the truth of this history, are like those wrong appearances of objects, which vanish as soon as they are brought to the light. But,

5. IT may be asked, what *need* was there of God's making any such *trial* as this ? Does he not *know* what is in man ? Are not *all things naked and open before his sight*, even the most secret thoughts and dispositions of the heart ? No one, at least no believer of scripture, disputes this : but what then ? Why, it will be said, since this trial was needless to inform God of *Abraham's* integrity, it is a dishonour to him to suppose he should

should make it. This is granted, if there were no other ends to be answered by it. But it must be considered, that the trial was not intended for the *instruction* of that Being who is *infinite* in *knowledge*; but of other beings, who may receive very great benefit by such an example. But does not the history as good as say, that God made the experiment for his *own* information? ^P *Now know I that thou fearest God, since thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me. Now know I*, as if he did not know it so well before: and is this speaking worthily of God? Not, if the words were to be *strictly* understood, or there was any *danger* of their being so understood by those who read the scriptures with tolerable care, and with a desire of finding out their true meaning. There are *several* ways of knowing the same thing: *Abraham's* sincerity was known to God by *immediate* inspection into his heart; he also knew it by the *effects* in many instances before this, and now by this extraordinary proof of it; and this manner of knowing it by *external* proof, could not be till that proof was given. That the sacred writer, by no expression he has used, intended to charge God with ignorance of *Abraham's* true character, till he had taken this method to acquaint himself with it, is plain,

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from the xviiith chapter, where he represents God giving this testimony to *Abraham*; I KNOW HIM, *that he will command his children, and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.* Can the same writer, who here represents the Almighty as saying, *I know Abraham*, a little after forget himself so far as to say, that God *did not know* him, till after this last demonstration of his entire devotedness to God? no certainly. By the former expression *I know him*, in which the truth is delivered without any figure, we are taught to apprehend what is said afterward, *now know I that thou fearest God*, &c. viz. as only speaking after the manner of men. If any one could doubt of God's knowing it before, yet now they must acknowledge that he had *full proof* of it. The worshippers of *idols* would be ready to own, that *Abraham's* God had the greatest reason to be satisfied with the zeal and devotion of his servant. These are some of the mighty objections by which the adversaries of revelation think to overthrow the credit of the scripture history. I have been longer in my answers to them than they deserved; believing that it would be a satisfaction to see, that the *strength* of infidelity is but *weakness*, and that the truth the more it is opposed triumphs the more. *False* religions and all corruptions of the *true*,
have

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have such arguments lying against them, as evidently demonstrate their falsity; and therefore wisely shun all inquiry. But the true religion loses nothing by examination, it shines the brighter after it has dispelled the clouds and mists which are raised about it. Its firmness is never so well seen as when it is assaulted; so that we may challenge it's opposers in the language of the prophet, *Associate yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; take counsel together, and it shall come to nought.* They are only like the waves which with a great deal of fury dash against the rock, but instead of removing that from its place, only discover their own weakness, and retire murmuring at their defeat. The more the word of God is hated and vilified by these sort of men, the more let us esteem, and love, and reverence it, for the *undeserved* reflections which are cast upon it. Let us study it the more carefully, beg of God to enlighten us with the saving knowledge of it, to establish and encrease our faith, and to teach us to make a right use of the difficulties which may at any time occur to our minds in reading the scriptures, or which may be suggested by others; remembering that these only show the comprehensiveness of the Divine understanding, and the narrowness of our own; and are many times,

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we have reason to think, *intended* to exercise our diligence and ingenuity: by which means they who are well affected to the truth, have an opportunity to distinguish themselves from those who are enemies to it; not quarrelling with the *revelations* of God if there be any thing in them they do not fully understand, when there are so many things which manifest the moral perfections of the Deity to a discerning and considerate mind. And this brings me to the next general head. But of that in the next discourse.





S E R M O N VII.

The end of *Abraham's* trial, with respect to himself, and the men of that generation.

GEN. xxii. 1, 2.

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham. And he said, behold here I am. And he said, take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

IN the former discourse I have endeavoured to vindicate this trial of *Abraham's* faith and obedience from those objections which are usually raised against it. I now proceed,

II. To represent the *wise designs* of providence *answered*, by God's trying the *father* of the *faithful* in the manner here related.

The design of this dispensation may be supposed to concern *Abraham himself*, or the *men of that generation*; or those of *all places and times*, to whom the knowledge of this event should come.

I. As to *Abraham himself*; he had, by occasion of this trial, the honour of receiving an *express testimony* to his *religious integrity* from the mouth of God; the satisfaction to know more thoroughly from his own *experience*; and the *happiness* of being *ascertained* of the *excellent disposition* of his *son*, of whose piety he could now no more doubt than of his own. This trial gave occasion to that *glorious testimony*, concerning the *integrity* of *Abraham*, from the mouth of God himself. *Now know I that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.* He before gave this testimony of him; *I know Abraham, that he will command his children, and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord.* He now gives it not only *of him*, but *to him*. He speaks to him directly and immediately; *I know that thou fearest God.* “ I knew it “ before this; I now *declare* to thee that “ I know it, that thou mayest have the “ pleasure to know thou hast my appro- “ bation; that the judgment of thy Maker “ concerning thee is, that thou art a *really* “ pious and upright man, and consequently

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" to be infallibly certain of the thing itself;
 " since he who is *omniscient* can never be
 " deceived in the judgment which he passes
 " upon any one." *Well done, good and faith-
 ful servant.* This, which will be the *final*
 sentence, in respect of every righteous per-
 son, was now, by a kind of anticipation,
 pronounced upon *Abraham*, and the sen-
 tence followed with a farther confirmation
 of the promise. *By myself have I sworn, saith
 the Lord,*¹ *for because thou hast done this
 thing, and hast not with-held thy son, thine
 only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and
 in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the
 stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is on
 the sea-shore. And thy seed shall possess the gate
 of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the na-
 tions of the earth be blessed, because thou hast
 obeyed my voice.* Thus was it said to the man
 whom God delighted to honour: and a
 very great honour surely it was to be com-
 mended and praised by the mouth of God;
 and a very great encouragement to persevere
 in the ways of religion, and to give all dili-
 gence to please God in his future behaviour,
 when he found that what he had now
 done was so exceeding acceptable to him,
 and would be so gloriously rewarded. And
 it was not a design unworthy of God, to
 encourage a good man to continue in the

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 practice

¹ Gen. xx. 16, 17, 18. *iii adol*

practice of goodness, and to strive to become still better. *Abraham's obedience was extraordinary, and it has an extraordinary attestation.*

HE had now likewise the *satisfaction* of having a *more thorough* knowledge of himself from his own experience. Besides the *inward* consciousness of his sincere love to God, and trust in his providence, which he had before, and the trials he had passed thro'; having given this last and severest *proof* of it, his *assurance* of the thing was *complete*, and his *joy full*. The witness within himself was entire; he was able to make out his sincerity in a way of argumentation with the utmost degree of evidence. And the consequence of this was, that he had one of the greatest pleasures of which the mind of man is capable, *viz.* that of having a clear view of the honesty and rectitude of his own heart. And *his heart not condemning him*, but on the contrary bearing witness with the voice from heaven, *he had confidence towards God.* The concurrence of these two, the conviction of his own mind, and the declared approbation of God, like the meeting of two streams, made his heart overflow with inexpressible delight. *His experience working hope*, and even such a hope as could never make him ashamed; henceforward nothing

[I John iii. 21.

[Rom. v. 4, 5.

thing would be able to move him from his hope, his reliance on the faithfulness of God would be rendered unshaken, by whatever difficulties and contrary appearances he might be assaulted; and who does not see, that it was by no means unworthy of God to furnish the *best* man very likely then in the world, and one who was to be an example to all posterity, with an opportunity of searching the very bottom of his heart, that he might have the greatest *rejoicing in himself*? which was the more expedient, because he was not to possess any part of *Canaan* in his own person, but only to have the prospect of its being inherited by his seed. To supply the want of immediate possession, he has a reward of another kind, even the pleasure of being approved by his own mind, and receiving the approbation of God, far preferable to any worldly enjoyment whatsoever.

THE *excellent* disposition of *Isaac* his son, was also *better known* to him by this trial than ever. Not that before this he had any reason to be dissatisfied with him, or to question his walking in the way of truth as he had done; for he who resigned *himself* with so much meekness, when about to be sacrificed, could never have been wanting in his duty either to God, or to his father, in the former part of his life: but his behaviour now
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carried the thing to the *highest* degree of certainty, and set the dutifulness and piety of his son in the *fullest* and *clearest* light before him, which answered a very good end; serving to convince *Abraham*, in the most satisfactory manner, of the wise choice which God had made of *Isaac*, as the person in whom *his seed* should be called, preferably to *Ishmael* his elder son. The different dispositions of these two sons, justified the preference of the younger. He only is worthy to inherit after *such* a father; to bear up his name, and to succeed to all the same *blessings*, who resembles him in his virtues, and will do all in his power to transmit them to his children. If *Isaac* was beloved before, he must be doubly beloved now; the soul of the father must rest in him with the most entire complacency. His love was a rational love, and would appear free from all partiality, being placed on the most *deserving* object; which would render it the more delightful, and warrant him to indulge it without any restraint. In such a son he saw himself reviv'd, could safely trust the cause of religion in his hands, secure of his preserving it in his family, when he should be dead and gone. “ Here is one
“ who after I have left the world, will stand
“ up in my room, serve and worship the
“ true God as I have done, and be an ex-
“ ample

“ ample of religion and virtue to the world
 “ about him” : and by this view *Abraham's*
 life was much the *happier* ; the comfort of
 every blessing was *increased* by the thoughts
 of his having such a son ; and he met death
 more contentedly, when he knew that re-
 ligion would not die with him, but still
 survive and flourish in this branch of his fa-
 mily. So that with regard to *Abraham* him-
 self, you see this trial was of great use, sup-
 plying a just occasion of that testimony
 which God gave him of his integrity, a
 singular honour to him, and most encour-
 aging to persevere in the service of the true
 God, and to aspire to yet more exalted de-
 grees of perfection ; as it gave him an
 opportunity of knowing himself more
 thoroughly from his own experience, and
 of discovering the excellent qualities and
 dispositions of his son. All which was a
 great addition to his happiness in the after
 part of his life, and such a reward as it
 became God to bestow on his faithful ser-
 vant, living in the midst of *idolaters*, and
 yet most inviolably attached to his service.

2. THIS transaction between *God* and
Abraham, was a *useful lesson* to the *men* of
 that *generation*, if they were at all disposed
 to reflect upon it, and improve it.

IDOLATRY had not only got footing in
 the world at that time, but prevailed much
 more than the worship of the one true God.
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The *Canaanites* in particular, among whom *Abraham* now dwelt, were turned aside after false gods. And 'tis very probable, that human sacrifices, then, as well as afterwards, made a part of their idol worship; if not *ordinarily*, yet upon *extraordinary* emergencies; since there is no tracing the beginning of this practice in history with any certainty, which one might be apt to think there would be, if it had not been exceeding ancient. And a farther argument of this seems to be, the little surprize which *Abraham* discovered upon receiving this command; which is much harder to be accounted for, if we suppose that no such thing had been known in the world till now. In that case, how must it have staggered him, to be ordered by the true God, to do a thing of a worse appearance than any that was ever heard of among the worshippers of idols? whereas 'tis only to suppose what is not at all unlikely, that in * *Chaldea*, *Abraham's* native country, and in † *Canaan*, where he now was, it was an usual thing for men to offer their children in sacrifice to the deities whom they worshipped, and a great part of the difficulty is removed;

* See what Said saith of the origin of idolatry and human sacrifices, in the time of Scrug. cited by Selden, *de Diis Syris*, p. 47.

† The Carthagenians, descended from the Phœnicians, natives of Canaan, were noted for human sacrifices. See Diodor. Sic. l. 20.

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removed ; because what a person has been accustomed to see from his childhood, and is commonly practised by people about him, however foolish and absurd in itself, does not cause that emotion in him, as it would do, if it were perfectly new. And if the truth was, as I here suppose it, that human sacrifices were not uncommon in *Abraham's* time ; then the design of God in this command might be, on the one hand, to convince the men of that age, that *Abraham* was not less affectionately devoted to the service of his God, than the most zealous idolaters were to theirs ; and on the other, by stopping the execution of the command, to shew, that *Abraham's* God was not like the *gods* of the *heathen*, who were never so well pleased as when their altars were stain'd with human blood.

I. ON the one hand here was an *instance* of *Abraham's devotedness* to his God, which the most zealous adorers of *idols* could not pretend to exceed. So intirely had he given up himself and all his to God, that he was ready to part with what was much dearer to him than his own life, as soon as God called for it ; even with the life of a beloved son, and in such circumstances too, as very much heightned the virtue of the action. So that the *heathen* could have no pretence to charge *Abraham* with having forsaken the religion of his country, the religion

gion in which he had been bred, and which then prevailed in the world, and to have preferred the worship of *Jehovah* to the worship of idols, for no other reason, but because his new religion required no such costly sacrifices as the old. They, who before this might have been ready enough to suggest, that at the bottom he was a man of no religion at all; and therefore, since he must put on the profession of some religion, in order to avoid the imputation of atheism, chose that in which there would be no danger of his being called upon to sacrifice himself, or his children; that otherwise he would as soon have been an idolater, as a worshipper of the God he now served, and who was a mere fiction of his own brain, not a real deity: these persons, I say, who might have sometimes talked after this manner, must be now convinced there was no foundation for any such reflections upon *Abraham*; that he *heartily* believed his God to be the true God, had *reason* to believe in him, had *really* such an intercourse with him as he pretended, and esteemed his loving-kindness as *better* than life. All this was evident, from the readiness with which *Abraham* addressed himself to fulfil this command; not only to *give up* his son, but to *sacrifice* him with his *own* hands, of which perhaps there had never been a single instance; which made his obedience the more extraordinary. His charac-

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ter as a man of undoubted piety, who for conscience sake only left his own country, and gave himself up to fulfil the divine commands, would henceforward stand fair in the judgment of those of other religions; which must give him a greater advantage in his endeavours to reclaim them from their errors.

2. ON the other hand, by *stopping* the execution of the command, here was an evident proof, that *Abraham's God* was another kind of being than the *gods* of the *nations*: one of *tender* compassions, the *creator* and *preserver* of mankind, not the *destroyer* of any who *feared him*, and *wrought righteousness*. He was satisfied with the trial of *Abraham's* faith, of which he made full proof, by his actually *stretching out his hand* to slay his son; and would not suffer the thing to proceed any farther. The determinate purpose of *Abraham* to offer his son, rather than decline obedience to his God, was highly pleasing to him; but the sacrifice itself he by no means approved: it was what he abhorred, and therefore in the critical moment called to him out of heaven by his angel, saying, *Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God: i. e.* now thou hast given a most glorious demonstration of it to the whole world, and thereby accomplished all that.

that I intended by this command, which I never designed should be executed. Here there was a very useful example for the men of that age, which might lead them to reflect upon the great difference between the God of *Abraham*, and their idol-gods; and be a means of bringing them to renounce the worship of such gods, or leave them inexcusable. “ Surely, *the Lord he is God!* Goodness is the proper attribute of the divinity, and he hath shown that it belongs to him; desiring only the *love* and *trust* of his worshippers, not their *blood*. Whereas a worship consisting of such cruel and impious rites as ours, must either be the invention of evil spirits, to whom alone such a service can be agreeable; or of wicked men, to keep the rest of the world in a slavish dependence upon them.” And this certainly was a design becoming the true God, to declare his dislike of human sacrifices, at a time when that mode of worship was *grown* or *growing* into fashion, and thereby confirm his title to Godhead in exclusion of all others. I confess, if what a late writer says be true, this reasoning is without foundation. He asserts, that a notion of the *super-eminent* merit and value of human sacrifices, as *free-will offerings* in extraordinary cases, continued for many hundred years in *Abraham’s* family; and that *Moses*, the famous lawgiver

lawgiver of *Israel*, proceeded upon this supposition in the constitution of his law. All his proof of this bold assertion, is a single passage in the last chapter of *Leviticus*, ver. 28, 29. which being examined, is nothing to his purpose: the words are, *No devoted thing, which a man shall devote unto the Lord of all that he hath, both of man and beast; and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed. Every devoted thing is most holy to the Lord: none devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death.* Here these two things must be owned to be evident: first, that *men* as well as *beasts* might be devoted unto the Lord, or laid under a solemn *anathema*, or curse; and secondly, that persons so devoted were *not to be redeemed*, but put to death. Neither of these can be denied: the only question is concerning the *persons* who might be devoted, and the *death* to which they were subjected. As to the *persons*, there is not the least ground to imagine, that it was the intention of God, or of the sacred writer, to give the *Israelites* a power over the lives of *innocent* persons, not even of strangers, and much less of their own nation, to dispose of them at their discretion. Would a wise lawgiver, as *Moses* certainly appears to have been, not to say the wise and holy God, have encouraged men to indulge their hu-

mour, or fancy, or passion, or even their cruelty after this manner? what frightful work might the words thus understood have sometimes occasioned? which yet we never find they did: a plain argument that the *Israelites* did not understand them in this sense. The meaning seems to be no more than this; that if in a *just war* with people who were *idolaters*, they should *vow* the death of any whom they took captive; or in case of crimes committed among themselves should devote the guilty to death; it should not be in their power, to recal what they had done, as they might be tempted to do by an ill-timed pity, or upon some motive of interest, sparing those who had deserved to die, and whom they had separated to death by a solemn vow: no price was to be accepted, as an equivalent for the life of a criminal so devoted. And what had this to do with *human sacrifices*? especially if we add, that the death inflicted upon such a devoted person, was not in the manner of a sacrifice, any more than that of an *unclean* beast, which in case of its being devoted, though it were *killed*, could not be *sacrificed*. And the same we are to conceive was done to men whose lives were devoted for *idolatry*, or some other crime: they were not offered in sacrifice upon the altar, but had their lives taken from them in some *common* way. If the posterity

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posterity of *Abraham* had such a notion of the value of human sacrifices, as *free-will offerings*, how is it we never meet, in all their history, with a single instance of an *Israelite's* zeal working this way? How is it, that not one person from *Abraham's* time to the coming of our Saviour, a space of near two thousand years, was ever found in a disposition to make a voluntary sacrifice to the true God of himself, or of any one for whom he had a value and affection? And if the law of *Moses* supposed the acceptableness of such sacrifices, how comes it that God, by the prophet, declared his never having commanded him, and his abhorrence of them as practised by the *heathen*, and by the *Jews* sometimes, when they gave into idolatry? 'The children of *Judah* have done evil in my sight, saith the Lord, they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it, and they have built the high places of *Tophet*, which is in the valley of the son of *Hinnom*, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart. The same detestation of human sacrifices is again repeated, chap. xix. ver. 4, 5. They have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burnt incense in it unto other gods; whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor

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Jerem. vii. 30, 31.

the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; they have built also the high-places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt-offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind. Would God, or the prophet in his name, have expressed so much anger and resentment upon this occasion, if the law of *Moses*, which the prophets themselves acknowledged to be from God, was liable to the charge of countenancing such unnatural sacrifices? A man must be strangely prejudiced against the scripture revelation, to bring an accusation against it which is so easily answered. What has been said, will farther obviate the argument drawn from the "history of *Jephtha's* vow. It is certain that *Jephtha* had no right to sacrifice his innocent daughter, nor the least thought of doing it when he made his vow; so that if he really offered her, as it was not a *free-will-offering*, and so no proof of the *high opinion* the family of *Abraham* had of such sacrifices; so it was in itself an *abominable* action, and which nothing could excuse, but his ignorance or mistake of the law of God; occasioned partly by the great corruption of the times, and partly by his having past so much of his life out of his own country, and in war. If he did it, 'twas
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on his own head, and not with the advice or approbation of the *high-priest*, with whom he ought to have consulted. 'Tho' for my part, I do not see any necessity of granting that he did sacrifice her: the contrary is to me far more probable. That as he would not have offered a *dog*, or an *ass*, for a burnt-offering, if he had been first met by either of these, because such sacrifices were expressly forbidden; so much less would he fall into the error of idolatrous nations, by offering his own daughter. And yet because his vow should not be entirely void, he would *sacrifice* all his *hope* of a *posterity* by her, and consequently of any posterity at all, she being his *only* child; by shutting her up from the world in a religious solitude, there to spend her time, as *Anna* the prophetess did, after she became a widow; who 'tis said ^w *departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayer, night and day*. This was doing to her according to his vow, as far as he lawfully could? nay, going farther than he could justifiably have done without her consent. And that he did no more, than thus consecrate her to the Lord in a single life, seems to be intimated by her requesting two months, in which to bewail with her companions her virgin state;

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^w Luke ii. 36, 37.

state; about which it can hardly be supposed she would have been so solicitous, and so little concerned about her life, if she had been devoted to death. And why after its being said, *he did with her according to his vow*, is it added, *that she knew no man*, but to signify that she continued unmarried after this to the time of her death? (of which there could be no doubt, if she was sacrificed at the end of two months;) the *daughters of Israel* going four times every year to lament her, or (as a learned commentator explains the word,) to praise her, celebrating that *heroic* virtue which made her so chearfully seclude herself from the society of the world, and renounce the prospect of a posterity for the sake of her country, and of her father's vow. The result is, *human sacrifices were never* approved by the true God; but, on the contrary, one reason why *Abram* was commanded to offer up *Isaac* was, that by *not permitting* the sacrifice when about to be offered, he might *declare* to all the world his *disapprobation* of this *barbarous* custom; and by this *manifestation* of his love to mankind, bring them back to the knowledge and worship of him, the first, and best of beings, the Creator and Governor of the world, the only living and true God.

III. As in other parts of his history, so particularly and eminently in this, *Abraham* was designed to be an *illustrious example* to all generations; even to those on whom the ends of the world should come. But I must reserve the enlargement on this head for the next discourse.





S E R M O N VIII.

The proper Influence of *Abraham's* faith on all succeeding generations.

GEN. XXII. I, 2.

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham. And he said, behold here I am. And he said, take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

HAVING vindicated this part of the scripture history from the *objections* raised against it, and represented the *wise designs of providence* which might be answer'd by God's thus trying *the father of the faithful*, as they may respect both *Abraham* himself, and the *men of that generation*; I proceed now, in the last place, to observe,

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III. THAT

III. THAT as in other parts of his history, so *particularly* and *eminently* in *this*, *Abraham* was designed to be an *illustrious example* to *all* generations; even to those on whom *the ends of the world* should come. And accordingly he has the honour to be celebrated in the writings of the *new* testament, as well as of the *old*, and propounded for a pattern to christians themselves; as indeed, all things considered, a more proper one could not have been chosen in all sacred history: one only excepted, the example of the son of God. In all this affair, *Abraham* may be considered as an example of the *right* way of *satisfying* ourselves under the *difficulties* which occur in *religion*, or in the *dispensations* of *providence*, viz. by making a *proper* use of our *reason*: of *singular piety* manifested in two things, his *faith* in the *perfections* and *promise* of God; and his *ready*, *cheerful*, *universal obedience* and *resignation* to his will: of *prudence* in managing matters so that he might not be hindered in the discharge of his duty, or tempted to quit it: of *constancy* and *perseverance* in what had been well begun: and, finally, of the *encouragement* which every one has to *follow God fully*.

I. WE

I. WE are taught by the example of *Abraham* the *right* way of *satisfying* ourselves under the *difficulties* which occur in *religion*; or, in the *dispensations* of *providence*, viz. by making a *proper* use of our *reason*. There was this considerable difficulty in *Abraham's* case, taken notice of by the writer to the *Hebrews*; that he was commanded to offer up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in *Isaac* shall thy seed be called. Upon which this thought would unavoidably arise in his mind; "but if I sacrifice *Isaac* before he has " a child, how can this promise be fulfilled?" To free himself from the uneasiness of this objection, he did not shut his eyes against it, and thus run on blindfold and headlong to the action commanded; but makes use of the understanding which God had given him, and to very good purpose. He *reasoned* upon the matter, and the result of his reasoning was this; that he saw his way clear and plain before him. In our translation, indeed, there is no mention made of this *reasoning* of *Abraham*, of whom it is said, that he offered up *Isaac*, accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure. But the original word, λογισαμεν, would have been more properly and exactly render'd, *reasoning*, that God was able, &c. When he had debated the matter in his thoughts, and

and compared things together, his idea of the power of God with his former experience, particularly in the birth of *Isaac*, he justly concluded, that the *command* and the *promise* were very *consistent*. A like method let us follow when doubts and difficulties offer themselves, whether in respect of the divine revelations, or the conduct of divine providence. Let us, imploring the illuminations of God's Spirit, exercise our rational faculties in the best manner we are able, and try what may be done. This way, perhaps, with the assistance of the *father of lights*, we may be able to clear up the whole difficulty to ourselves; or if not that, yet to remove a great part of it. At least after a serious and impartial consideration of things, we shall be better able to judge on which side the truth lies, and see that the difficulties attending any particular important doctrine of revelation, and much more the truth of the revelation in general, are no way equal to the evidences of its certainty, and ought not therefore to shake our belief of it. As it is the *same* God who has given us *reason* and *revelation*, and who has given us revelation only to *supply* the *defects* of reason, not wholly to *supercede* the use of it; it cannot but be highly pleasing to him, when we employ our reason in examining the proofs of revelation, in finding out

out the true sense and meaning of it, and finally in freeing ourselves, as much as possible, from every doubt and perplexity; that we may have all the satisfaction in the belief and meditation of divine truths, which they are naturally fitted to afford us. What the apostle saith of the law, * *that it is good if a man use it lawfully*, may be applied here. Reason is good, if we use it *reasonably*, i. e. with a *modest* sense of its weakness and narrowness, a humble *dependence* upon *divine* aid, and due *care* that we do not, either thro' overmuch *haste*, or the influence of corrupt *prejudices*, mistake that for a reason and evidence which is only a false appearance of it. With these conditions, the *more* we use our reason or understanding in religion, the *better*; we shall bring more credit to it, and receive more benefit, and pleasure, and establishment in it. Thus likewise we should act under *difficult providences*, if I may so call them. Is there any thing in the events which befall us, or others, which is apt to stagger our faith, or trust in the providence of God? Let us lay aside all *partiality*, or undue respect to *ourselves*, and *friends*, and *party*, consider things in their *connection* with one another, and in their *final* issue, and labour to raise our minds *above* a fond regard to this bodily life, and all

all the enjoyments of it ; estimating all events by their influence on our spiritual and everlasting state : let us take some such method as this, and *reason* will *justify* the wisdom and expediency of all those dispensations of providence, which *passion* might carry us to *condemn* ; and convince us, that we have no ground to doubt of an *universal* or *particular* providence, or to discontinue or abate our trust in it. Are we in circumstances of affliction, and does the flood of sorrow swell and run high in our breast ? are we ready to despond and sink under our burden, and in the darkness which surrounds us, to pronounce ourselves forsaken of God, and miserable ? we should not abandon the case as desperate, but think what may be offered for our own support and consolation, as well as in vindication of divine providence ; we should endeavour to give ourselves satisfaction, and be, in some sort, our own advisers and comforters. We should do this, because, in most cases, satisfactory arguments are to be had, if we look for them ; because these arguments, duly considered, would not fail of having a good effect on the minds of christians, to compose and settle them ; and, in a word, because no one can reasonably expect to receive satisfaction and comfort, who will not contribute

bute his own endeavours towards obtaining them.

2. *ABRAHAM* is an *example* to all ages of *singular piety*, manifested in these two things; his *faith* in the *perfections* and *promise* of God, and his *ready, chearful, absolute obedience* and *resignation* to his will. Both these are comprehended in the expression of *fearing God*. *Now know I that thou fearest God*; “art filled with an awful persuasion that the Lord is God, and possessest of all divine perfections; under the powerful influence of which belief, I see thou art ready to give any proof which shall be required of thy sincere and entire obedience to him.”

1. *ABRAHAM* ^v *was strong in faith, giving glory to God*. He shew'd himself to have a right notion, and full conviction upon his mind, of the divine perfections, particularly of the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of God. He believed him to be the *only wise God*, and therefore thought it *his* wisdom to submit his own understanding to the Divine; which being infinite and infallible, he had no reason to question the fitness of every thing he commanded, tho' he himself, for want of a better light, and more comprehensive view of things, was no competent judge of that fitness. It was enough that
the

the command was not apparently unfit; that he did not discern a manifest inconsistency between the command, and the wisdom of the being from whom it was supposed to come. The command was a *peculiar* and *excepted* case, not designed for a *standing* law that should oblige the descendants of *Abraham* to offer human sacrifices among others, as a part of the established service of God. The wisdom of God, as the moral Governor of the world, will not permit us to suppose he can ever be the author of such a law: nor, if *Isaac* had been sacrificed, was he to have continued in the state of the dead, but to have returned to life again. The contrary would have been *unfit*, because it would have made God unfaithful: but in God's commanding him to sacrifice his son, with an intention, as he thought, of raising him again, he did not discover any unfitness; and for ought he knew, the thing might be very fit, adapted to serve many valuable ends: for he was sensible, that his own views of things were very short and imperfect; and that it was not for him to dictate to infinite wisdom, and pass sentence upon any of its decrees; and therefore he did not pretend to do it: proceeding upon a belief, that God being infinitely wise, had good reasons for what he did, whether he saw them or no. And herein we should all imitate

imitate this good man; not presuming to make our own understanding the *measure* of fitness. Perhaps we do not discover the great usefulness of every *occasional* command, or of *all* the *positive* institutions of religion under the law; or the propriety of the methods taken in the government of the world, and the distribution of moral advantages to the several parts and ages of it; but can we *demonstrate* that any of the ways or laws of God are *not fit* and *useful*? If not, let us not take upon us to censure them as unbecoming God, and therefore falsely passing under his name; unless we think that God cannot see farther than we, nor have reasons for his conduct which are above our comprehension. If we have otherwise good reason to believe that God has given such and such laws, and ordered the affairs of the moral world after such a manner; let us remember, that barely our not comprehending the fitness of them, is no proof of the contrary: and therefore, as *Abraham* did, let us pay our homage to the Divine wisdom, by resting satisfied in all its determinations. We farther see, that *Abraham* had the most *enlarged* notions of the *power* of God, since he believed it extended to the *raising* the *dead* to life; nay, not only to raise a body forsaken of life, tho' still retaining its form; but to restore a body, the figure of which was *entirely destroyed*, and its parts
severed

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severed one from the other. For this was the case here. After *Isaac* had been offered for a burnt-offering, he expected he would some time or other rise again out of his ashes, the *same* person as before; which, by the way, seems to prove, that *Abraham* had a notion of the *distinction* of the soul from the body, and its *separate* existence; for, otherwise, if the *whole* being would have been extinguished, the life of the *soul* as well as of the *body*, or he had thought so; how could he have regarded the *new* being as properly the *very same* with the former? This was to think *worthily* of God, to conceive of him not only as having a power to *kill*, but to *make alive*; and having this idea of the power of God, as able to raise his son from the dead, and which is more, to effect a general resurrection, (which no doubt was an article of *Abraham's* creed,) he could not doubt of his being able to do every thing else he pleased, so that he might depend upon his help in every time of need. Let us endeavour to have our minds possessed with the same honourable thoughts of the Divine omnipotence, and apply them particularly to the doctrine of the resurrection; the difficulties of which do all disappear as soon as we reflect upon the boundless power of God. --- Thus likewise, in his reliance upon the immutable *faithfulness* of God in his *promises*, *Abraham* is a

pattern for all generations to follow. God having promised him a numerous posterity by *Isaac*, he never once questioned the completion of the promise. Rather than be worse than his word, he was persuaded that God would work a miracle, and bring up *Isaac* from the dead: and indeed, truth and faithfulness are necessary attributes of an all-perfect Being. The God of *Abraham*, if he had not been true to his word, would have proved himself not to be the true God; but that he was the true God, *Abraham* had enough to satisfy him in what had passed between them, and therefore made as sure of every thing which was promised him by this unchangeable Being, as if he had it in actual possession. Such a trust as this, in the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of God, does at once bring the greatest honour to the Deity, and the most solid peace and repose to the human mind. Thus did *Abraham* approve his *faith*, which was the first branch of his piety.

2. His piety appeared in his *ready, cheerful, absolute obedience* and *resignation* to the Divine will. Indeed, *Abraham's* whole life, from the time of leaving his own country, is a most useful lesson of an entire obedience to the will of God, arising from a firm belief of his infinite perfections. His faith was not a lifeless, unactive principle, as is that

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that of too many: ³ By faith being called to go out into a place he should afterwards receive for an inheritance, not in his own person, but in his posterity; more than four hundred years after, he obeyed and went out, not knowing whether he went; only he knew he could not go wrong while he followed such a guide. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. Contented to be in an unsettled condition, removing from place to place without any other possession than that of a field to bury in. His patience was tried in waiting so many years before the promised son was born: nor then were his trials at an end, the most difficult part of all was still behind, that which was to crown and finish his example. After long expectations, he obtains his desire, the child grew in stature, and in favour with God and man; the father especially, with unspeakable pleasure observed his blooming virtues, and justly promised himself still greater satisfactions in him. When by the time his affections were thoroughly engaged, and his very life might seem to be bound up in that of his son, he is commanded to make a sacrifice of him; which if offered would have been the most precious one that ever was, excepting the sa-

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² Heb. xi. 8.

crifice of the son of God. What a trial was here ! Read the history, particularly the words of the text, in which he is ordered to give this proof of his entire obedience to God: *Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee unto the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.* Every word aggravates the severity of the stroke, and is a dagger to stab him to the heart. “ What my son ? the son of my
“ bowels ? my only son by the partner of my
“ vows ? the son so long expected, and so
“ greatly and justly beloved ? the son in
“ whom I placed all my delight, and concerning whom I was ready to say, this
“ same shall comfort us, and be a reward
“ for all our troubles ? To have the sentence
“ of death passed upon so dear, so lovely a
“ child, is extremely grievous : and must I
“ be the *executioner* of it ? what ? a father
“ kill his son, and such a son ! what will
“ they who are not gone after the idolatry
“ of the world, and do not know the truth
“ of the matter, say of such an action, and of
“ such a father ? With my son I shall sacrifice
“ my joys, and all the tenderness of my nature.
“ And tho’ I believe he will be restor’d
“ to life again, yet when that will be I know
“ not ; perhaps not till after I am gone out of
“ the world.” -- And yet, notwithstanding all these cutting thoughts, how was this order
received

received by him? does he stand to question its authority, or dispute its reasonableness, or murmur and repine while he complies with it? So far from it, that he prepares for the immediate execution. *He rose up early in the morning*; he breaks through the restraints of natural affection, which we may conceive were not feeble, and would not give heed to any objections, which a blind passion would have suggested in plenty if indulged: so that his obedience was ready and chearful. And we may farther add, that it was *absolute*; for as the apostle reasons concerning the love of God, *He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* we may say here, he that stood this greatest trial, would have stood any other: he who was willing to offer up his beloved son to God, would not have withheld any thing else from him. His obedience and resignation, whatever other instances had been chosen, would have been the same; the greater still implying the less. This, in short, is the only obedience and resignation worthy of God, even such an one as is universal, hath no exceptions, but reaches to the most difficult actions, and dearest enjoyments, as well as others. Well therefore might the apostle *James* ask,

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* Rom. viii. 32.

^b Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? We may be allowed to build upon our faith, if it produce an obedience like Abraham's: ^c for this was written for our learning, that we thro' patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Next to the piety of Abraham, let us consider

3. THE prudence he shewed in so conducting the affair, that he might not be hindered in the discharge of his duty, and tempted to quit it. To make the execution of his design the surer, he keeps it locked up in his own bosom, not imparting it to any one; or, in the language of St. Paul, ^d not consulting with flesh and blood, not so much as to Sarah, the partner of his heart and of his cares, who 'tis probable was living at that time, to prevent at once all objections which might be offered, and even the least delay of his undertaking. Not that he suspected the piety of his wife, but he did not know how far maternal fondness might prevail, what difficulties it might throw in his way, and to what degree he might be affected by the agony and distress, which the thought of her only son's being about to

^b James ii. 21.

^c Rom. xv. 4.

^d Gal. i. 16.

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to be sacrificed, might occasion in the soul of the tender mother. He thought it his prudence not to try the strength of Sarah's fortitude and resolution, or his own, when it was needless; and therefore wisely kept silence, by which means he saved his wife a great deal of anxiety and distress, which she would otherwise have undergone, and himself the pain and trouble of answering her objections, if she should have raised any, or at best of conflicting with her weakness and tenderness, as well as his own. Nor did he communicate the secret to his son, till it could be no longer a secret to him; both because he would not put him to more pain than was necessary, and make him suffer before his time, and because he could not tell what impression the prospect of death, as it approached, might make upon his son; or what effect the sorrow and disturbance of his son might have upon him. This holds forth a very good instruction to us, viz. that we should not multiply temptations and difficulties to ourselves without necessity, but make them as few and as weak as possible, considering our own frailty; and that whatever trials and duties we are called to, we may be able to go through them with more ease, and readiness, and safety.

4. *ABRAHAM* is a remarkable example of constancy and perseverance in what

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has

has been well begun. What he did was not the effect of a sudden impulse, a blaze of devotion, which would have quickly gone out. If his had not been the warmth of a steady rational zeal, he had time enough to cool again, and to waver in his resolution if it was not firmly fixed. It was not till the third day after his having received this command, that *Abraham* came to the mountain where he was to offer up his son; during all which time, what a multitude of thoughts, and some of them troublesome and disquieting enough, must have past through his mind. He could not but have this intended sacrifice always in his thoughts, as he had his son continually in his sight; and comparing these two together, his son now so charming and lovely an object, with the dreadful appearance he would make with the blood flowing out from the ghastly wound which his father's knife must make, or consuming in the flames; what a conflict of passions must he have within him! and with what difficulty must he answer that question of his innocent son: *My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?* If *Abraham* had not been a man of uncommon resolution, the tumult and flow of passions which this question must have raised in him, would have choaked up his words, and have rendered

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dered him for a time speechless : but none of these things moved him so as to weaken his resolution, or abate the speed he made to accomplish it. Knowing his purpose to be well formed, he held it fast, and would not let it go. And after this pattern of *constancy* should we all walk ; not only *beginning* well, and *enduring* for a *time*, and afterwards drawing back ; but *patiently continue in well-doing*, or in suffering evil, and showing the same fortitude and stability of mind to the end, how long soever our trials of any kind may last : forasmuch as God^d will take care that ^e *we shall not be tempted above what we are able ; and ^f if we remain faithful to the death, will give us a crown of life and ^g glory which fadeth not away.* Which minds me of the last particular I shall mention.

5. THAT in *Abraham* we have an *example* of the *encouragement* which every one has to follow God *fully*. In him we see the *degree* to which righteousness and piety may be carried, and from the *acceptance* he found, are justified in making this general conclusion, that ^h *verily there is a reward for the righteous ; not perhaps of the same kind as the reward of this good man was in the present world, but of the same kind as that higher reward, of which this temporal one* was

^e 1 Cor. x. 13.

^f 1 Pet. v. 4.

^g Rev. ii. 10.

^h Psal. lviii. 11.

was an earnest. Every truly pious man, every one who is disposed and resolved to obey God without any limitations or exceptions, is sure of being approved of God as *Abraham* was; and that this approbation will no more be without suitable effect in his case, than it was in that of *Abraham*. So well pleased was God with this mark of *Abraham's* piety, that he calls to him out of heaven, saying, *by myself have I sworn, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.* There were peculiar reasons for this promise to *Abraham*; but as we are hereby informed that God was highly pleased with the faith and obedience of his servant, so we may safely infer from it, that every proportionable degree of virtue and piety will be proportionably acceptable to God in all ages of the world; and that what he accepts he does not want power and bounty to reward in such a manner and degree, as his wisdom, always un-erring, judges best; with temporal blessings, as often as is for his glory and the real happiness of his servants; or however that be, with the everlasting rest and pleasures

pleasures of the next life. I presume you are now convinced that God had *wise* reasons for thus trying the faith of *Abraham*, I will therefore close the subject with two inferences.

I. HAD we no other answer to give, this alone would *clear* the *providence* of God from the charge of *partiality* in the *choice* he was pleased to make of the *Israelites* for his *peculiar* people. *God is no respecter of persons*: this is the language both of reason and revelation; and yet from this conduct towards that people, some have been ready to conclude that the God of *Israel* was so; while others have been contented to resolve all into *absolute sovereignty*. Between these two there is a *middle way*, which seems the right, and which we are pointed to by the present subject. That God, who is a lover of righteousness, was willing to give an example of his great regard to it for the instruction of all ages, by rewarding the eminent piety and virtue of *Abraham*, and afterwards of *Isaac* and *Jacob* in their posterity. *Moses* tells them plainly, that it ¹ *was not for their righteousness that they went to possess the land; but for the wickedness of the Canaanites did the Lord drive them out before them*, (which however shews there was some reason for preferring them to the *Canaanites*) and that he
might

might perform the word which the Lord swore to their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And why did God enter into covenant with these good men, confirming it with an oath? was it not out of mere arbitrary will and pleasure; or to manifest his acceptance of their piety and obedience? This latter is evidently the truth. As, to consider the instance of *Abraham*; the first time of God's promising *Abraham* ^k that he would make him a great nation, and bless him, and make his name great, and that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed, was on condition of his leaving his own country, and kindred, and father's house; and his faith in this promise, and ready compliance with this command, justified the choice which God had made of him for the father of a new race, and an example of virtue to all posterity: ^l For, being called of God, to go into a place which he should afterwards receive for an inheritance, by faith he obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither he went. And in like manner God renewed the covenant with *Abraham* after his intended sacrifice of *Isaac*, saying, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing, I will bless thee, &c. So that in the favours bestowed on the *Israelitish* nation, God rewarded

^k Gen. xii. 1—4.^l Heb. xi. 8.

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rewarded the obedience of their pious ancestors; ^m *they were beloved for the father's sake.* In which God acted according to the usual laws of friendship, expressing the love he had for *Abraham* his friend, by the kindness he shewed to his remotest posterity. *Moses* therefore tells the *Israelites*, ⁿ *Because he loved thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, therefore he chose their seed after them:* or, as he elsewhere expresses it, *because he had a delight in thy fathers to love them.* And was there nothing in the characters of these holy patriarchs, which might make them more proper objects of the love of God than some others? was not the character of *Jacob* preferable to that of *Esau*? the character of *Isaac* to that of *Ishmael*? and that of *Abraham*, as 'tis probable, to the character of any others? and after all, they were only temporal blessings which the *Israelites* enjoyed as the natural descendants of *Abraham*. The eternal rewards of the next life are dispensed according to every man's *personal* character and behaviour: each single person will receive ^o *according to the things done in his body, whether good or bad.*

2. THIS should encourage us, in imitation of the father of the faithful, to *resign up ourselves, and all we have, into the hands of God,*

^m Rom. xi. 21.

ⁿ Deut. iv. 37. x. 15.

^o 2 Cor. v. 10.

God, our supream Lord and disposer, with a resolution to *obey* the more *difficult* commands ; and whenever he *calls* for them, readily to *part* with the most *beloved* enjoyments. We know not how God may see fit to try us before we go out of the world. It can, indeed, be hardly supposed that our trials should be equal to those of *Abraham* ; but whatever they be, God will not be wanting to assist us if we do our best, and to reward our patience, and zeal, and faithfulness, in the most glorious manner hereafter. With regard to our children particularly, we should humbly and chearfully acquiesce in the determinations of providence concerning them, whether as to life or death. Parents are usually not a little solicitous for the real welfare and happiness of their children in this life ; many thoughts of heart they have upon this account ; what relates to their children being much the same to them, as if it immediately concerned themselves : nay, I believe instances are to be found of those, whom the evils and afflictions of the present state would not wound so deeply in their own persons, as when suffered by their children. But can they not trust that God who gave them children, with the disposal of them ? hath he not a right to it ? Is not ^p *the mercy of*

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the Lord from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness to childrens children? it is indeed added, to such as keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them: which is to be understood not only of the parents but of the children, who cannot expect to inherit the peculiar favour and blessing of God from those whose piety they do not imitate. But if you yourselves chuse the way of the Lord, and it is no fault of yours that your children do not follow you herein, as in this case you have nothing for which to answer, so nothing about which to disturb yourselves: since God will not deny his grace to any who do not put it from them, and will, in a special manner, give his Holy Spirit to the children of good men, who have peculiar advantages and opportunities for obtaining it: and the care, and vigilance, and pains we bestow in the religious education of our children, how fruitless soever it may prove to them, shall not be without effect to ourselves, but draw down the blessings of heaven upon our own heads. And with the same entire resignation, when God takes our children from us by death, should we submit to the appointment of his wisdom. Had we the prospect of a great deal of comfort in their lives? it must be owned this increases the difficulty of parting with them; but it contains at the same

same time a mitigation of our sorrow at their loss, when in *proportion* to the *pleasure* and *satisfaction* we had in their *lives*, on account of their dutiful behaviour, both to their earthly and heavenly parent, is the *hope* we have in their *death*. God was greatly pleased with the resignation of *Abraham*, and so will he be with ours. We shall hereby make a virtue of a necessity, and the death of our children will be accepted, as if it were a *voluntary* sacrifice of our own. Whatever difference there may be in other respects between *Abraham's* case and ours, in this we agree to manifest the *same* prevailing faith, and love, and resignation. Let us therefore, by the practice of these virtues, be prepared for all events. Let the *same* faith be in us which was in *Abraham*; the same firm persuasion of the wisdom, power, faithfulness and goodness of God. When our faith is weak, our courage and our hopes will be weak, and we shall be liable to faint in the day of adversity; but on the contrary, when our faith is strong, the waves and billows of affliction may roll over our heads, but will not be able to drown our hopes, or to carry us off from the rock of our salvation. Let us love God as *Abraham* did, and then we shall be able to sacrifice what, besides him, we love most, to his pleasure. My losses are as *nothing*, while I can say that *God is mine!*
Shall

Shall I be grieved beyond measure that he gives me an *opportunity* to express my *superior* affection to him by consenting to part with other things in submission to his will? Surely faith and love, if they possess'd me more entirely, would render my resignation to the Divine will more compleat. We pray, as our saviour hath taught us, *thy will be done*; let our whole behaviour make it evident that we are sincere in this petition, and that we say *amen* to it with our *hearts*: for if we say one thing with our lips, and another with our hearts, what will it profit us? The present life is the only state of trial; here alone we are liable to suffer in our persons, or in any of our enjoyments: and this should teach us not *barely* to be *contented* but *thankful*; since the vicissitudes and trials of this mortal life, as they will be quickly over, so will be of great use to prepare us for everlasting rest.

^a Matth. vi. 10.





S E R M O N IX.

The Sufficiency of a standing Revelation to bring Men to Repentance.

LUKE XVI. 30, 31.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead; they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

IN the parable of which the words now read are the conclusion, our blessed Lord, the more effectually to warn his disciples against the vices which too commonly attend great abundance; such as *irreligion, sensuality, and unmercifulness to the poor;* and

and to convince them that there is no judging of the happiness of mankind from their present worldly circumstances; sets before them two very different examples: one of a wicked rich man; *who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day*; (this was the best that could be said of him) the other of a pious man, but a beggar, *named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate full of sores.* ^a *The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance, but the name of the wicked shall rot*: this may be one reason, that while the poor man, whose piety made him honourable in the sight of God, is called by his name, the name of the rich is sunk in oblivion; tho' of the two it is better to be quite forgotten, than to be remembered with a mark of infamy. Altho' the beggar was so modest as to desire only to *be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table*; yet it is not said that his request was granted: the contrary is rather intimated by what is immediately added, *that the dogs came and licked his sores*; as much as to say, these brute animals reproved the inhumanity of their master, by shewing more kindness in their way to the wretched object than he did. And is it thus that heaven treats its favourites? is this the reward of piety? this the way in which God shews himself angry with

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^a Psal. cxii. 6. Prov. x. 7.

the wicked? Be not too hasty to judge any thing before the time. Only consider the *different ends* of these two men. Follow them into the other world, and you will see the scene is changed. And that you might have the better view of that invisible state, our Saviour draws the curtain from before it. It *came to pass the beggar died*; perhaps of want. He *died*, but of his *funeral* there is no mention; his body being thrown into the earth without any ceremony. But then if the poor carcass was not borne in pomp to the grave, here was something which more than made amends for it: *He, i. e. his soul, was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom*, into a place of great happiness, where he enjoyed the company of the *father of the faithful*, and lay in his *bosom*: he, who but a little before had no other lodging than the cold ground. *The rich man also died, and was buried*, he had an expensive interment; so far his riches *accompanied*, tho' they did not really *profit* him. But, alas! the next account we have of him is, that in *hell, Hades*, in the abodes of separate souls, *he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried, and said, father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented*
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in this flame. 'Tis now his turn to beg, and he is brought in making his address to *Abraham*, and calling him *father*; because the *Jews* built very much upon the relation they had to this their pious ancestor, so as to be ready to think that a son of *Abraham* could not finally miscarry. And whereas he only requests, that *Lazarus* might dip the tip of his finger in water, which could have availed little to assuage his torments; for what signifies a drop of water in the extremity of a burning thirst, or cast upon raging flames? we are to remember that this is not so much a *history* as a *parable*; and that the thing meant is, that he shall not have the least mercy who would show none. Denying a crumb of bread, he shall not have a drop of water. This is farther implied in *Abraham's* answer: *But Abraham said, son, remember, that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulph fixed, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us who would come from thence.* He calls him *son*; which only aggravates his guilt and his misery, that being of the posterity of this good man, and consequently, besides the benefit of his example, having peculiar advantages for knowing the will of God,

and obtaining his favour; he should, notwithstanding, prove degenerate, and thereby forfeit all title to the rewards promised by God to the obedient. He had already received his *good things*; that is, those things in which he placed his happiness, without deserving even these, or making a tolerable use of them; while his poor neighbour *did* good, and *suffer'd* evil. It was therefore fit that there should at length be an exchange of circumstances, and each be in a condition which better suited his actions and character. And for the favour he requested, it could not possibly be granted him, in regard that by an *irreversible* decree all intercourse between the two worlds of *blessed* and *damm'd* spirits was for ever cut off, and there was no passing from one to the other; from the mansions of the blessed in order to execute some message of mercy; or, from the regions of woe in order to flee from avenging justice. This petition of the rich man for himself not succeeding, he turns intercessor for his brethren who survived him. *I pray thee therefore, father Abraham, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.* But are we to be sent then to the *damm'd* to learn charity and compassion? On the contrary, is it not natural for those in misery to envy the
happi-

happinefs of others, instead of defiring it? What other motive had the devil to contrive the seduction of our first parents? or what other principle can he act upon in tempting their posterity, but envy of mankind, and hatred and revenge against the Creator? The common solution of this difficulty is, that this *seeming* kindness of the rich man to his *brethren* was only the effect of *self-love*; being apprehensive, that their misery to which he had contributed by his example, and other ways, would be an increase of his own. But from the same reflection, ought not the evil angels to let mankind alone, since their own punishment will be greater in proportion to the numbers whom they mislead and destroy? unless you will say, that their hatred of the Deity is so desperate as to over-rule all other considerations, even that of their own interest. There seems to me to be no more in it than this, that natural affection usually working this way to make men desirous of the happiness of their near relations, and this being only a *parable*, every circumstance of which is not designed to represent things exactly as they are; our Saviour describes the transaction in the other world after the same manner as if it happened in this; that is, he supposes the man to carry the same affec-

tion to his kindred into the separate state, which he had while he was living. Not that there is any necessity of believing that men really do; but so it is represented, for the sake of the instruction which we receive from the answer to this petition. *Abraham said to him, they have Moses and the prophets, let them bear them.* The ordinary means which God has appointed, and which they enjoy for their conviction and amendment, are sufficient; and therefore 'tis unreasonable for them to expect, or for others to desire, in their behalf, such as lie out of the *stated* course of things. Let them make all the advantage which they can and ought to make of the revelation God has vouchsafed them, and they cannot but be wise and happy. This was enough in reason to silence the petitioner, but he still urges his suit. *Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead they will repent.* Here again we are to call to mind, that this is no more than a parable; and that therefore we cannot argue from hence, that any who are entred into the invisible world are capable of reasoning after this manner. No, they must certainly know better, and be convinced, that God has actually done all which his wisdom would allow, for preventing the misery of his creatures. If they thought otherwise, the misery of the wicked in the
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next life would be less, when they believed that the ordinary means failing, the goodness of God should have prompted him to make use of others, in order to reclaim them from their destructive courses. But here is the sting of their misery, that the goodness of God was exercised towards them in the means and opportunities for attaining happiness, as far as was consistent with the wise ends of providence. If therefore the *rich man* is represented putting this supposition, it is only to signify how very apt mankind are to censure the methods of providence in this respect, as if they were deficient in wisdom or goodness: the folly and unreasonableness of which kind of thoughts our Saviour intimates in *Abraham's* reply. *And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the dead.* In discoursing on these words, I shall

I. CONSIDER more generally this *prone-ness* in *mankind* to think, that God might have done *more* than he has to *prevent* the *sin* and *misery* of his *creatures*, and to *promote* their *virtue* and *happiness*; with the *causes* of it, and the great *unreasonableness* of all such reflections upon providence.

II. I SHALL consider more *particularly* the case here supposed, of a messenger sent from

from the dead in order to bring men to a better mind.

I. LET us consider more *generally* this *proneness* in *mankind* to think, that God might have done *more* than he has to *prevent* the *sin* and *misery* of his *creatures*, and to *promote* their *virtue* and *happiness*; with the *causes* of it, and the great *unreasonableness* of all such reflections upon providence.

I. 'TIS a matter of *fact* which falls under *common observation*, that there is such a *proneness* in *mankind* to think, that God might have done *more* than he has to *prevent* the *sin* and *misery* of his *creatures*, and to *promote* their *virtue* and *happiness*. And indeed supposing the doctrine of *absolute decrees* were true, there would be evidently too much foundation for such a charge as this. Since upon this supposition, instead of using *all* the means which infinite wisdom and goodness would have suggested for bringing about the happiness of those who perish, God does not afford them the means *absolutely necessary* to this end, not seriously designing their happiness, or that they should be in a capacity for attaining it, but determining the contrary. To that question of God by the Prophet, *what could I have done more for my vineyard, that I have not done?*

Isai. v. 4.

done? this short answer might be returned, which would admit of no reply; that he should at least have made it *possible* for them to avoid their destruction; which he has not done in case all their actions, those for which they are finally punished, as well as others, are the effects of *inevitable* necessity. Whoever therefore would satisfactorily vindicate the dealings of God with the sons of men, must abandon this notion of *absolute decrees*, as utterly irreconcilable with all our ideas of right and wrong. *Wisdom can never be justified of her children* upon this supposition; or rather, there would be no such thing as wisdom or goodness in the dispensations of God to mankind. But without taking advantage of this doctrine, which gives a most unjust representation of the divine proceedings, there are other things which too often enter into the hearts of men, not well affected to God and religion, and are by them esteemed difficulties and objections not to be got over. The very *freedom* of man is one of those things from which they frame an accusation against his Maker. For if the happiness of *all* his creatures would have been agreeable to him, why would he put it into their power to make themselves miserable by the abuse of their liberty? should he not rather have so ordered it, that they should have been *necessarily* and *universally*

fally determined, either by the frame of their nature, or by the circumstances in which he placed them, to chuse and act right? whereas now 'tis not only *possible* for them to go astray, but a thing not to be avoided without a great deal of care and vigilance.

AGAIN, they fancy that to *convince* mankind of his being and providence, or to *put* them in *mind* of these, God should frequently *interpose* to controul and alter the course of *second* causes. Those miraculous events which are reported to have happened in some ages, such as arresting the sun in its course, and dividing the waters, making them to stand in heaps on each side, should be repeated in every age; more especially those wonderful works which it is pretended were performed to prove the truth of the *Jewish* and *Christian* revelations; which is so far from being done, ^b that *all things continue as they were from the beginning of the world*. The sun rises and sets without any variation, the seasons come round in their order, and natural causes constantly produce their natural effects. We see none of those extraordinary and supernatural operations which would oblige us to cry out, ^c *this is the finger of God*. After this perverse manner do they reason, who *scoff* at religion, and *walk after their own lusts*. Again, why does
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^b 2 Pet. iii. 4.

^c Exod. viii. 19.

not God make a more *visible distinction* between good and bad men in *this* life, disposing of their conditions, so as that these should mark out their respective characters: encouraging the practice of virtue by making it the sure way to worldly prosperity; and discouraging men from vice by punishing every vicious person with the loss of all those things which are the great temptations to it? Why, finally, as often as vice, and error, and superstition, are become *prevailing* in any age or part of the world, and the disease is run to too great a head for the ordinary method of cure, does not God make use of some extraordinary methods for their recovery, but suffer things to proceed from bad to worse? In such kinds of reasonings as these, does this *proneness* of *mankind* to find fault with the ways of God, betray itself.

2. THE *causes* of this come next to be enquired into, and these following are some of the most *common*: *pride* of understanding, *ignorance*, *rashness* and *inconsideration*, not *knowing* or not *attending* to what God *has actually done* for men, and *irregular passions*.

1. *PRIDE* of *understanding*: this is one cause, and a principal one, of men's taking upon themselves to arraign the Divine proceedings. They imagine themselves capable

pable judges of the reasons of every part of God's providential conduct, and do in effect make their apprehensions of things the standards of what is fit to be done : and therefore, when things are not done as they fancy they ought to be, they are offended at it ; and instead of ascribing it to the weakness and shallowness of their own understandings, are rather apt to suspect a deficiency somewhere else. This is a strange way of arguing ; such a method *seems to me best* to be taken in the government of the world, therefore it *is best*. I should take such a method, if things were under my direction, therefore *God ought* to do it. These are such extravagant thoughts, that they would never once enter into the minds of men, if they did not conceit themselves much wiser than really they are, and *over-rate* the *little* understanding which God has given them : *little*, I mean, when compared with the *boundless* extent of *truth*, and with the *understanding* of *God*, which is infinite ; how valuable soever in itself, and as the foundation, if rightly improved, of a great deal of happiness. For the happiness of intelligent beings is founded in their understandings, and far exceeds any happiness of which inferior natures are capable ; for which reason we ought to be thankful for our intellectual faculties, and to take all the opportunities we have of cultivating them :
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but then we should not think them fitted for more than they are; because hereby, instead of making them instrumental to our happiness, we are led into many dangerous mistakes, and create ourselves a great deal of dissatisfaction and uneasiness.

2. *IGNORANCE* is another *cause* of our assuming so much to ourselves. I am not here speaking of that ignorance which necessarily cleaves to the human faculties, especially in this present state of doubt and obscurity; but an ignorance arising from a want of care to instruct ourselves in the things of God. The most *ignorant* are always the most presuming: the *pride* I before mentioned does generally proceed from hence: it is the fruit of ignorance, of gross inexcusable ignorance. Men are busied about present things, and do not trouble themselves to know God, nor *regard the operations of his hands*. ^d *The works of God are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein*; but they have no pleasure in this search, and therefore are without understanding in Divine things; ^e *they are far above, out of their sight*. This ignorance, as it makes them fonder of passing sentence upon the ways of God towards themselves or others, so more subject to mistake when they do it: for want of sufficient light, things do not appear as they

^d Psal. cxi. 2.

^e Psal. x. 5.

they are. The mind is as unavoidably deceived in this mental darkness, which surrounds it, when it makes a positive judgment of objects, as the bodily eye is in that which is external.

3. *RASHNESS* and *inconsideration* are faults to which the greater part of mankind are very liable. They love to intermeddle in things too high for them, those ^f *secret things which belong to God*, and not to them; officious to give their opinions, not only of the actions of their fellow creatures, but of the conduct of God himself in his providence; while they have not the patience for that examination and enquiry which are necessary before they undertake to judge. What more common than for men thus rashly to judge one another, and their judgments being rash, it is no wonder they are so often false. This precipitancy of judging cannot be excused, when it regards the conduct of other men, and much less when it extends to the Divine proceedings. At least we should allow ourselves time for close and serious consideration, before we pretend to decide concerning matters of so deep a nature, and such high importance. As ^g *our heart should not be hasty to utter any thing before God*, so neither concerning him: *for God is in heaven, and we upon earth*. He is a Being infinitely great and glorious,

^f Deut. xxix. 29.

^g Eccles. v. 2.

glorious, whom it becomes not us to approach without the utmost reverence, nor to follow in his providential dispensations without the greatest caution, and the most attentive regard. ^h *He that is hasty in spirit*, in this sense as well as in that meant by *Solomon, exalteth folly*. The judgment of such men, deserves only to be despised; and usually they punish themselves for it: for the same temper betrays itself in their own conduct; causing them, for want of sufficient deliberation, to take many a wrong step, and to do things which they afterwards wish undone.

4. Too many are prone to think that God might have done more to promote the virtue and happiness of his creatures, because they *do not know*, or *don't attend to*, what *he has done*. Did they reflect on this till their hearts were warm'd with that gratitude which his innumerable benefits demand from them, they would not be so forward to censure the methods of his providence; they would break out in a devout rapture, ⁱ *O how great is his goodness to the children of men!* instead of audaciously asking, why is it not greater? Hath not God form'd us with *excellent* faculties, given us *sufficient* directions how we ought to employ them, and *abun-*

^h Prov. xiv. 29.ⁱ Psal. xxxi. 19.

dant encouragement to exercise them in doing those things which he requires of us? since if we perform our duty in some measure, as we are capable of doing it, we have the prospect of a happiness commensurate to our most enlarged capacities. Are not God's [†] *tender mercies over all his works*? has[†] he left any part of mankind without witness? If he has given less to some than to others, does he not require less? does he not govern them at present, and will he not hereafter judge them, by laws, to the knowledge of which they may easily arrive, and which they may obey if they will? And as to ourselves, have we not means, and helps, and motives, much more than are *barely* sufficient for the knowledge and practice of our duty? Instead of thinking of this, and considering the goodness of God, which, great as it is in itself, is render'd still greater by their unworthy abuse of it; mankind too frequently lessen their own guilt and the mercies of God, and value the least shadow of good that is in themselves at an excessive price, so as to be ready to think God can never do enough for them.

5. THE last cause of this I shall mention, and which operates most strongly, are *vicious and irregular passions*. Men corrupt their affections, and these corrupt their judgments;

[†] Psal. cxiv. 9.

[†] Acts xiv. 17.

ments; so that at length they are of a *reprobate* or *undiscerning* mind; not able to distinguish, as they should, between *moral* truth and falsehood. ^m *They call good evil, and evil good; put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.* This is the ordinary effect of habitual wickedness. Having indulged to their depraved inclinations till they have got the entire mastery of them, they not only *act* as they command, tho' never so much to their own prejudice; but *reason* just as they dictate. Their very understandings are enslaved, as well as their wills; and as much as they pretend to *free-thinking*, they seldom or never think with true freedom. In practical matters, how indeed should they, when they are under the perpetual bias of criminal inclinations, and shut their eyes that they may not see what would oblige them to condemn themselves? No wonder such as these are willing to find fault with the proceedings of God towards them; 'tis because they would fain remove the charge of their ruin from themselves, and have a pretence for still continuing in a course of sin. They are too much *parties* to be proper judges. Could they get free from the influence of vicious affections, and divest themselves of that blind and foolish self-love which makes them par-

tial and prejudiced in their own cause; they would soon be sensible, that if they miss of happiness, the blame must all lie at their own door --- Thus I have considered some of the most usual *causes* of that *proneness* there is in mankind, to think that *God could have done more* than he has to prevent the sin and misery of his creatures, and to promote their virtue and happiness.

3. I proceed next to shew the great *unreasonableness* of all such reflections upon providence. There is no real ground for them; and they are as contrary to reason and truth, as darkness is to light. Of this we shall be sensible if we only consider the following things:

1. GOD being *infinitely wise*, it must needs follow, that he has *disposed* and *ordered* all things in the *best and wisest* manner. The *cause* is known by the *effects*, and the wisdom of God by the marks and signatures of wisdom which are upon his works. That Being cannot want wisdom who contrived this wonderful frame of things, in which there is such an infinite variety of parts, (infinite, I mean, with respect to us) all of them so plac'd and mov'd, as to conspire to the beauty and usefulness of the whole. And when, besides these admirable discoveries of the Divine wisdom, we farther consider, that whatever degrees of knowledge and
wisdom

wisdom are found in other beings, they are all derived from the same fountain of light; we cannot but conclude, this wisdom, as it exists in its uncreated source, is without all bounds. And what is the consequence of God's being *infinitely* wise, but that he *always* acts wisely; for thus he must act, unless he be under the influence of some wrong bias, which the perfect rectitude of his nature will not allow us to suppose. The light of the divine understanding shines always clear and unclouded; he clearly discerns, without the least hazard of being ever mistaken, what is best and fittest to be done; and, as there is nothing in himself, and nothing can occur from without, to make him do what he does not approve, ^a *all his works must be done in truth*: and therefore, if there be any thing which at first sight does not appear to us worthy of infinite wisdom, all that we are allowed is, to examine whether it be something which God has *really* done, or is only *falsely* supposed to have done. If it be truly ascribed to God, we may be confident that it is exactly as it should be; and that ^o *nothing* is to be *added to it*, or *taken from it*. Indeed we may not see the *reasons* of the Divine conduct, it cannot be expected we should in many cases; but it is certain there must be the *best* reason for every part of it,

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whether

^a Psal. xxxiii. 4.^o Eccles. iii. 14.

whether we see it or no : and by *reason*, I do not mean what is drawn from absolute sovereignty, but from the *nature* of things, the *relations* in which God stands to other intelligent beings as their Creator and Governour, and the *wise* and *good designs* to which every thing that God does in the government of the world, has some subserviency.

2. WE are to consider that the *goodness* of God is in its exercise *directed* by his *wisdom*. It is certain they do not consider this, who are apt to reflect on his goodness as not exercised towards his creatures in the degree it might be. For if they considered this, they would forbear all such reflections, as utterly unjust, or without foundation. The goodness of God is a *wise* goodness; and it would not be worthy the most excellent of all beings if it were not. There is no doubt that the power of God, and his dominion over all things is such, that he *could* do a great many things which he does not; the reason is, that he does not judge it *fit* to do them. He *could immediately* place his creatures in a state of unchangeable happiness; and were his goodness a *mere* natural *inclination*, unguided by *wisdom*, it would certainly lead him to do this. But we wrong the goodness of God if we think of it after this manner. In the order of our conceptions, *wisdom* is before all

all the moral attributes, being the spring and foundation of them all. He is *just* and *true*, because to his infinite understanding it *appears best* that he should be so: and because he cannot but see this, nor act otherwise than *wisdom* directs, he is therefore in this sense necessarily and unchangeably just and true. And the same may be said of his goodness. He *is* good, because it is a perfection to be so; and he *does* good, because in doing it he follows the dictates of his eternal *wisdom*. And for the same reason that this holds as to doing good in general, it must hold likewise as to the *manner* and the *degree* of doing it. In both these *wisdom* is the supreme director. Unless therefore we can prove, that *wisdom* would have allowed his going *farther* in the displays of his goodness towards the children of men than he has done, and that in this case his goodness would have been *more* extensive and divine; all objections of this kind must fall to the ground. And instead of being able to prove this, we might easily satisfy ourselves of the contrary from the perfection of the Divine nature; and shall be satisfied of it at last, when we are admitted to take a view of the scheme of providence, in the disposition and order of *all* its parts, in the *finishing* of the whole design. It will then be seen that there was a wonderful *harmony*

of the Divine attributes, and of goodness among the rest, in the conduct of providence from the beginning to the end of its dealings with the race of mankind.

3. GOD having *established* a course and order of things in the world, it is not becoming his *majesty* and *greatness*, or which is the same here, his *wisdom*, to *break* in upon it *without* evident *necessity*. And will we say, that there is any such necessity of God's interposing in a miraculous and extraordinary manner, as often as men make an ill use, or none at all, of the means and assistances which he supplies them with by their *natural* powers, by a *standing Revelation*, and in his *common* providence? must God go out of *his* way to put them in *theirs*, whenever they wilfully leave it? because they act irregularly in the *moral* world, must God depart from the rules which he has settled in the *natural*? what would be the consequence of this, but the greatest confusion and unsteadiness, instead of that order which now reigns every where? No: if men transgress the laws which God has prescribed them, he will not therefore lightly contradict or dispense with those by which he governs the motions of natural causes. ^p *The rock shall not be removed out of its place*, only to indulge them in an unreasonable humour. God governs

^p Job xviii. 4.

verns the world by *steadier* measures than these. The *constancy* of his works is the *beauty* of them: and tho' he will not for the sake of this constancy and regularity, be wanting in any thing *really* necessary and convenient for the happiness of his reasonable creatures; yet there is no reason why he should change his method of proceeding, every time they by their inexcuseable perverseness, and chosen folly, put from them that happiness which he originally designed them, and has actually placed within their reach. This would be making *miracles* too *cheap* of all reason. 'Tis enough that out of great compassion to sinful mankind, God has condescended so far as to reveal himself to them by his own Son, and to confirm this revelation by a variety of miraculous gifts; not to mention the marks of its divine original stamp'd upon the revelation itself. This revelation cannot be accused of imperfection, nor have we at this distance of time any good reason to doubt of the truth of the miracles by which it was established, or of its being conveyed down to us without any material corruption or alteration. And what need then that miracles should be repeated from time to time, only to gratify a *vain* curiosity, or an *obstinate* incredulity? Tho' God be always ready to *condescend* where it is *proper*, yet we must not imagine he will ever act *beneath* himself.

4. GOD, for *wise* reasons, having placed us on our *trial* for a future state, he *adapts* the *methods* of his dealings with us to our *present* condition and circumstances. This life is the time of our trial, the next of recompences: and are we able to say that any thing is denied us, which a state of trial makes expedient? have we any duties incumbent upon us, which we either want opportunities to know, or power to perform? If we are ignorant, must not our ignorance be without excuse? if we continue under the dominion of sinful inclinations, is not this the true reason of it, that we *will not* be made free? we must not complain that God does not more for us than is *proper* to a state of *trial*; much less that he does not what is *inconsistent* with such a state. A state of trial, in the very notion of it, implies a *possibility* of going astray, both in *thinking* and *acting*, in judgment and practice. Two things particularly are to be tried, *viz.* our *faith* and our *steadfastness* in the cause of virtue and religion. As for our *faith*, where would be the commendableness of that, if there was no temptation at all to unbelief; if our minds were overruled, and conviction forced upon us, either by the nature of the evidence, or the strength of the inward impression? In this case believing would not be properly an act of *ours*, since we should be wholly *passive* in it. And
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so with regard to our *steadfastness* in the cause of virtue and religion; how could there be any *virtue* where there was no *choice*? if God determined us in an irresistible manner, as without dispute he is *able* to do, though being so determined we should certainly act right, if it could be called action; yet there would be no *praise* or moral *worth* in such actions: nor should we be entitled to any reward for standing firm in the profession and practice of religion, when we *could not* fall. And the argument holds in *proportion*, where the temptations to deviate from our duty are very *few* and *inconsiderable*. The less the opposition, the less honour must attend the victory. I might add,

5. THAT were some of those things done which are not, but we fancy ought to be, they would perhaps have *no more* effect, than those methods which God has *actually* employed. We should find out some way to evade the force of these, as we have done of others; and rather than give up our darling lusts, should never want something to plead in justification of ourselves for indulging them. And what should we get by this, when by not improving greater advantages, we should only render our guilt the greater? But the consideration of this will fall in better under another part of my subject.

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LET what has been said, teach us to think more honourably of God, and of the methods he has taken to conduct men to happiness, than too many are apt to think. Let us hold fast to this, that *God is good*, and that he *does* and *will do* us all the good we can *reasonably* expect from him. Let us do our part, and not doubt but God will do his. All the danger is on our side: and let us remember the danger is all of our own making. Let the circumstances in which God places us, be what they will, this is still certain, that our *obligations* are always in proportion to our *advantages*, and that we are obliged to do no more than we can, and than we have sufficient encouragement to do. And if we will not be prevailed on sincerely to endeavour the securing our own happiness, the fault must be entirely in ourselves, and not chargeable on a deficiency in the Divine goodness. Think well of God, and it will go a great way to conquer all your prejudices against his laws. If we believe God to be infinitely good, we must esteem his *laws* to flow from his *wise* goodness, as well as his promises; and if this be our notion of the Divine precepts, that they are not so much the effects of *authority* as of *goodness*, we shall not be easy in ourselves without obeying them. Our own minds, if not lost to all sense of ingenuity,
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will not allow us any quiet in a course of disobedience. To offend against the authority of God is bad, but to abuse his goodness will appear still more odious ; one is *daring*, the other is *base* and *ungrateful*.

I have done with the first observation on the *unreasonable proneness* there is in mankind to think, that God might have *done more* than he has to *prevent* the sin and misery of his creatures, and to *promote* their virtue and happiness. I am,

II. To consider more particularly the *case here supposed*, of a *messenger sent from the dead*, in order to bring men to a better mind ; and this I shall do in another discourse, commending what has been now offered, to your serious and impartial consideration, and to the Divine blessing.





S E R M O N X.

The Sufficiency of a standing Revelation to bring Men to Repentance.

LUKE XVI. 30, 31.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead; they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

IN a preceding discourse on these words, I proposed two things:

I. To consider the general proneness in mankind to think, that God might have done more than he has to prevent the sin and misery

misery of his creatures, and to *promote* their virtue and happiness; with the *causes* of it; and the great *unreasonableness* of all such reflections upon Providence. This I have dispatched, and now advance,

II. To consider more particularly the *case here supposed*, of a *messenger sent from the dead*, in order to bring men to a *better* mind. Nay, *father Abraham*, but if one went unto them *from the dead*; they will repent. By this expression, by *one coming from the dead*, may be meant, either an *apparition* or a *resurrection*. It is somewhat uncertain, which of these is intended; for tho' what is called *coming from the dead*, in the 30th verse, is in the next verse expressed by *rising from the dead*, (which may seem to determine it for a proper resurrection of the body,) yet as rising from the dead, in this place, may signify no more than *appearing* as one *really* risen, and the thing which mankind are apt to fancy should be granted them, is not the raising of the dead body, that the departed soul, being re-united to it, may be capable of delivering its message from the other world; but only the soul's putting on a *visible* appearance for this purpose, as a body of *air* or the like, which they conceive may be easily done if God please: for this reason I should incline to think, that no more is here meant, than an apparition of a person departed

parted out of this life, or at least that there is no necessity of understanding the other.

THE great question here is, whether the method proposed by the rich man, was in order to recover his brethren from *infidelity*, or from *impenitency*. That what is here said does not relate to the cure of *infidelity*, seems to me most probable. Among the *Jews*, the *Sadducees* were the *only* persons who disbelieved the separate existence of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments. The *Pharisees*, who were the *most prevailing* sect, and followed by the *main* body of the nation, were in different sentiments. The evangelists ^a *Matthew* and *Luke* say expressly, that *the Sadducees deny any resurrection*: and the question they ask our Saviour concerning a woman who had successively married seven brethren, *whose wife of them she would be in the resurrection?* was by them intended as an objection against it. And in the *Acts* there is a passage which fully expresses the sentiments of both these sects: ^b *When Paul perceived that one part were Pharisees, and the other Sadducees, he cried out in the council, men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose*

^a Matth. xxii. 23, &c. Luke xx. 27. ^b Acts xxiii. 6, — 9.

arose a diffention between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say, that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry; and the Scribes, who were of the Pharisees part, arose, and strove, saying, we find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God. And the account given by * *Josephus*, a Jewish historian, of the opinion of these men, is agreeable to this of *St. Luke*: he saith of the Pharisees, "that they believe an immortal
 " power in souls, and that there are re-
 " wards and punishments for those who
 " in this life have practised virtue or vice;
 " that to the latter there is appointed an
 " eternal prison, but that the former have a
 " power of reviving. On the contrary, the
 " Sadducees are of opinion, that souls perish
 " with their bodies; denying the continu-
 " ance of souls, and the punishments and re-
 " wards of *Hades*;" the very word which we translate *hell* in this parable. There being this difference between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, that the latter believed a state after death, the other did not; if there be any reason to think, that our Saviour designed this parable more especially against the Pharisees, who allowed a future state,

* *Josephus's Antiquities*, l. 18. c. 1. sect. 3, 4.

and that, consequently, the rich man and his five brethren are to be regarded as *Pharisees*, or friends and patrons of that sect; it will follow, that the *disbelief* of a life to come, is not the thing here struck at. Now the *only* persons of whom we have mention made in the preceding part of the chapter, are the *Pharisees*; who being covetous, did not like our Saviour's discourse against the *love of riches*, but *derided him*; as if he did not understand the *law*, which promised worldly prosperity, nor the *true happiness of life*, which they fancy to consist in these things, *ver. 14.* The verses lying between this and the 19th verse, where the parable begins, are very applicable to the same men. And in the parable, our Lord plainly resumes the former subject of the inordinate love of riches, and *unfaithfulness* in the use of them; illustrating it by the example of the *rich man*, who was so far from making a pious improvement of his riches, in doing good, and communicating to the indigent, that he spent them all upon his lusts. It is therefore most probable, that the *Pharisees*, and not the *Sadducees*, were glanced at here. And what farther confirms this notion is, that *Abraham* appeals to the *prophets*, as well as the writings of *Moses*, as sufficient to satisfy the surviving brethren of this rich man. *They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.*
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If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. Now this appeal to the *prophets* would hardly have been made, if our Saviour had the unbelieving *Sadducees* in his eye, because they admitted only of the *five books of Moses*, as of Divine authority: and therefore, when our Saviour would convince these men of a future resurrection, and state of happiness for the righteous, he does not draw his argument from the *prophets*, but from these words of God to *Moses*, when he appeared to him in the *burning bush*: *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.* Now, tho' this was certainly a very good argument, yet lying a little out of the way, it may be questioned, whether our Lord would not have rather pressed them with more *direct* passages out of some of the *prophets*, as *Daniel* for instance, if the *Sadducees* had owned their authority. These things afford a probable argument, that the parable was not levelled against the *Sadducees*; and if not, forasmuch as they were the *only* persons among the *Jews* who denied a future state, it could not be our Saviour's design in this place, to assert the inefficacy of extraordinary means, even of a message from the other

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world,

world, to bring men to *believe* where the ordinary means failed, but to reclaim them from a course of *habitual wickedness*. And a farther proof that *infidelity*, or the disbelief of a future state of rewards and punishments is not here meant, may be taken from the words of the rich man : *nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will* REPENT. Observe, he saith not, *they will believe*, but *they will repent*. They will be sensible of the folly and madness of their vicious course of life, and immediately forsake it. And though in *Abraham's* answer a different word is used, *neither will they be* PERSUADED, *tho' one rose from the dead*, yet the sense is the same ; and being *persuaded* here, must signify the same as *repenting* in the former verse, *i. e.* being persuaded to leave that wicked way of life in which they were engaged. However, though from what has been now said, I take leave to conclude, that the case here supposed does not *directly* concern *infidelity*, I shall notwithstanding consider it a little in this view ; and the rather, because some persons seem to have a high notion of this method of curing men of their infidelity, and to make it an argument against a future state, that it is not used. The *unreasonableness* of this way of thinking, that *if one came from the dead*, men would *believe* ; and that therefore, if there

there be another world besides this, this method ought to be taken; I say, the unreasonableness of this way of thinking may be easily shewn: I shall for this purpose mention two or three observations.

I. IT is altogether *unnecessary*, that a messenger should be sent express from the *dead*, to give men notice of another life, and therefore unreasonable in any to resolve they will not believe without it. There are proofs enough of a future state besides this, drawn from reason and scripture: and if it be said that these do not satisfy, the answer is plain, that the fault does not lie in the arguments, but in the temper of their minds. For these arguments have convinced others, and why then should they not prevail upon them? Is it that they are persons of greater penetration than the rest of mankind, and have sought after the truth with more application and impartiality? or does their moral character as men of sobriety and integrity, exceed that of the believers of a future state? quite the reverse of all this is true. To *one unbeliever* of any eminence for learning and solid sense, and of a tolerable life and conversation, *hundreds* may be produced from among the *believers* of a future state, of much superior talents, and whose lives have done honour to their profession. And where is the reason, that men, who are neither lovers of *truth*,

lovers of *good*, must have greater evidence indulged them, than that with which men, much better than they, are contented, and reckon abundantly sufficient? what have they done to deserve such a privilege? let them first make a right use of their natural faculties, fairly examine the proofs of a future state from reason, and the arguments for the truth of christianity, of which this doctrine makes an essential article; and while they are doing this, let them frequently and fervently implore the assistance and direction of the *Father of lights*, and live up to the light and conviction they have, *cleansing themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*: let them take this course, and then complain, if after all they do not see sufficient reasons for believing. And certainly, till they make a *better* use of the *ordinary* means of conviction, they have no right to insist upon their being favoured with those which are *extraordinary*. Bishop Burnet, in his *memoirs* of the famous *Earl of Rochester*, gives us an account of that noble Lord's entering into a formal engagement with another gentleman of *quality*, that if either of them died in the sea-fight which was then expected, he should appear, and give the other notice of the future state, if there was any. That gentleman was killed by a cannon ball; but not appearing to the *Earl* after his death, according to the

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the agreement between them, it was a great snare to him during the rest of his life. But afterwards, in his sickness, he acknowledged to the *Bishop*, that it was an unreasonable thing for him to think that beings in another state were not under such laws and limits, that they could not command their own motions, but as the superior power should order them: and that one who had so corrupted the natural principles of truth as he had done, had no reason to expect such an extraordinary thing should be done for his conviction.---Every one must needs think, that *without leave* there can be no correspondence between the inhabitants of the other world and this; and why this *leave* should be *granted* to any, when it is no way necessary, and to gratify the greatest enemies to God and goodness, who of all men have the least pretensions to it, no good reason can be given: while there may be, and probably are, very good reasons lying against it. That taken from the *nature* of the present state, in which *we are to walk by faith, not by sight*, and to approve the sincerity of our virtue, and of our love of the truth, by acting upon evidence sufficient to convince reasonable creatures who give due attention to it, that so our conduct may be the more rewardable; I say, the reason drawn from hence, for fixing

such boundaries between this world and the world of spirits as they are not allowed to pass, is so satisfactory, as to make the mention of any others needless. Must these visits from the other world be frequent and common, or only vouchsafed now and then, and to some particular persons? if only to some particular persons, what would others say who were denied this way of conviction? if they were usual things, how would this so well consist with the nature of the present state?

2. IT is very *questionable*, whether they who believe not a life after this, upon the testimony of reason and revelation, would be *persuaded* of the truth of it, tho' *one came to them from the dead*. That this would not always be the effect is very probable; because the same corrupt passions which blind their minds against the evidences of revelation, and the proofs which natural reason affords of a future state, would excite them to try all the ways they could think of, to elude and baffle any discovery made them by a messenger from the *dead*. Were the message to be sent to some *other* person, and not immediately to them; to be sure they would reject it, and treat any relation of this kind with scorn and ridicule: so that in order to convert this tribe of men, *every one* of them must have a *vision* of his own. And sup-
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posing they had ; would they all presently turn believers, and continue such ? perhaps not. The hurry which such an extraordinary visit would put them into would not be small ; and when the fright was pretty well worn off, they would be ready to conclude, finding themselves in so different a condition, that they had been in a sort of *delirium* ; and that all which had passed was only a delusive scene of the imagination, not a reality. We find the *apostles* were so astonished when their Master was *transfigured* before them, and *Moses* and *Elias* appeared talking with them, that *Peter* hardly knew what he said ; and as something like this would happen to an infidel from the sudden appearance of a deceased friend, and as the disorder and amazement he would be in, would furnish him afterwards with a handle for disputing the truth of the vision, he would not fail to take hold of it. Among the *heathen philosophers* there was a whole sect who believed the soul to perish with the body ; and yet these same men did not deny, that there were such things as apparitions of men deceased, because they thought they could account for them in a *natural* way, without granting that the soul had an existence in a state of separation from the body. So that these *fathers* in *infidelity* would not have been convinced, though a spirit had
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had actually appeared to them. And if together with the vision there had been a *voice*, they would have said, that the voice was only the effect of the *strong impression* which such a surprizing *sight* made upon them : and what should hinder our modern unbelievers from arguing after some such manner ? At best might they not say, that if such apparitions were real, and were allowed to prove the existence of spirits in their nature invisible to eyes of flesh, yet this would be no argument that these *spectres* were the souls of men departed ? for why may not *other* spirits represent such scenes before men, only to *impose* upon them ? the thing is not *impossible*, and they would believe it to be *real* fact, rather than admit of a future state, in which they must give an account of their actions in this. And farther, if their infidelity was shaken at first, yet in a little time it would gradually recover the ground it had lost, and they would again return to their former *unbelief* or *scepticism*. The pursuits of pleasure or ambition, the sophistry of their passions, and the noise, and mirth, and ridicule, they would meet with in the conversation of their old companions, would put all such thoughts to flight, as idle tales and fancies.

3. To how *little purpose* would it be for men to be made *profelytes* to the *belief* of a
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life to come, if they still continued to *act* as if there was *no* such life? what good would the *truth* do them without the *practice* of *righteousness*? is there nothing more than mere believing necessary? doubtless there is: nor is *faith* of any value, farther than it is joined with a virtuous and good life. Suppose therefore, after having received such a message from the other world, a man should not be able to help believing the real existence of invisible beings, he would be in much the *same* condition he was before, for any benefit he would receive from this belief, unless he altered his course of life: and of this there would be little hope, as will be shown afterwards. Indeed were mens leading an ungodly life *wholly* the effect of their *not believing* a future state of recompences; then, by the same method as they were brought to believe, they would be brought from their disobedience too; the *cause* being removed, the *effect* would cease of course: but this is seldom, if ever the case. Men do not *begin* with infidelity, but their *morals* are first depraved; and this depravity in their morals prevailing more and more, leads them by degrees first to dispute, and then to deny, the received doctrine of a future state; which, after the rate they live, it is not their interest should be true. Their unbelief therefore is only the *effect*, and that may

may be taken away, and the *cause* of it, which is to be fought for in the *corruption* of the *heart*, still remain ; and so their condition, instead of being *mended* by this means, will in respect of the guilt of their sins be made rather *worse* than it was before. I would make a reflection or two on what has been offered on this view of the case.

1. LET us learn to *prize* the means which God *hath* given us, for the begetting and confirming in us the belief of invisible things ; and let us make these means as useful to ourselves as we can, by a diligent improvement. If we find in ourselves any inclination to question a future state, let us consider how little reason we have to do this; the chief prejudices against the belief arising either from *sense*, which conversing only with corporeal objects, tempts men to question whether there are any other : or from sinful *lusts and passions*, which can be no friends to any truth, which would check and forbid the free gratification of them; as the belief of a life to come would do. Now *sense* being of a *lower* order than *reason*, can be no *rule* by which reasonable creatures should judge and govern themselves. And as for the *irregular passions* of the heart, the opposition they raise against reason is even greater than that of *sense*. Reason is the only faculty whose dictates we are to follow; and

and provided we take all the care we can to restore our reason to its freedom and purity, and then consult it upon the question concerning the reality of a future state, and the proofs of the christian religion, with a sincere desire of coming to the knowledge of the truth, and a resolution to adhere to it; we shall render that justice to the Governour of the world as to acknowledge, that he does not require us to believe without evidence.

Blessed be God for the gospel revelation! 'tis on every account worthy of all acceptation, having had the most glorious attestations, and containing the most important doctrines; among others, this of a state of recompences after death, in which ^k all men shall be judged according to what they have done in the body, whether it be good or evil; and after sentence is past upon them, shall go away, the wicked into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal. Being in possession of such sacred and important truths, let us seriously meditate upon them; and resolve that no temptations whatsoever shall draw us aside from the path of life and immortality.

2. LET us not lay such a *stress* as too many do, upon the common *stories* of *apparitions*, as if the certainty of another world depended upon them, and every one was to be

^k 2 Cor. v. 10. Rom. ii. 6. Matt. xxv. 46.

be suspected of leaning to infidelity, who presumed to dispute their truth. If we think such relations are well attested, and that the circumstances render them credible, let us believe them; but withal remember, that true or false, these stories do not *affect* the belief of a future state, which *without* these stands *firm* upon the joint testimony of *reason* and *scripture*; and that neither reason nor scripture give us any warrant to expect such an intercourse with the invisible world. It can be of little service to the truth, to combat infidelity with such weapons as these; because the truth does not need them, and it may do a great deal of hurt. For when so great a fondness is expressed for stories of this nature, and they are received without any, or upon very little examination; the enemies to religion will be apt to impute it to a *consciousness* of the *insufficiency* of the rational and scripture arguments: for if these are thought abundantly sufficient, why do they manifest such a *solicitude* about the stories of *spectres* and *apparitions*? and then when any of these stories appear to be false, the conclusion is, that they are all so, and the notion of a future state no better, which is made to rest upon them. Whether therefore we see reason to receive or reject these stories, our belief of the soul's immortality should stand upon another foundation, which
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we are sure cannot deceive us ; and we should be contented to leave men at their liberty to believe one way or the other in respect of these relations, as they do in any disputable point of common history. - - - Thus I have taken occasion to consider the case of *infidelity*, tho' the words of the text do not, as I apprehend, immediately refer to it.

LET us now consider this *proposal* of a *messenger* from the *dead* in another view, or as intended to *reclaim* men from their *impenitency* in a wicked course. There are two things which shew the *unreasonableness* of such a proposal. The *first* is the *sufficiency* of the *ordinary* and appointed means to bring men to repentance ; and the *second*, the *little hope*, where these fail of having any effect, that the method here proposed would have any better success.

I. THE *standing* and *ordinary* means have all the *sufficiency* which can be desired in them for this purpose. Is there not enough in the *reason* and *nature* of things, and in the *doctrine* of *scripture*, to induce men to *repent* ?

I. WERE we only to consider the *reason* of the thing, arguments in plenty will offer themselves to every man's mind, why he should not sin ; but not one why (if he has been so foolish and wicked, so regardless of his duty and interest, as to sin wilfully) he should

should not repent of it. Every argument against doing a thing, is an argument for undoing it as much and as soon as possible: that is, every argument for virtue and religion is an argument for repentance, if we have been vicious. Is it not a powerful recommendation of virtue and religion, to creatures capable of them, that there is no other way of acting agreeable to their reasonable nature, and consequently no other way of being happy? since the happiness of every being must consist in such actions and enjoyments as are suitable to its nature. By a religious and good life is meant the employment of the faculties in the best and most useful manner; the due government of the passions, that they may not be placed on improper objects, or transgress their prescribed bounds; and preserving a regularity and order in the external actions, that they may all centre in the same excellent end, and not clash with each other. This is virtue and religion, and this is true happiness; as the contrary to this is sin and misery. Nothing more is necessary to make the sinner miserable than the shame and uneasiness he feels in himself, from the reproaches of conscience, the disordered state of his soul, and the guilty scene which presents itself when he reflects upon his past life. He can indeed neither look backward nor forward,
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within or without, with any manner of satisfaction. And, making the best of it then, is not *sin* a very *foolish* thing? and *repentance*, if we have been guilty of this folly, a very *wise* one? Repentance is only returning into the right way after we have wander'd from it; being restored to a sound mind from a state of madness and distraction; forrowing for our false pleasures, that we may be capable of those which are true; and exchanging a diseased, dangerous, unquiet state for a state of health, of safety and tranquillity: and needs there an extraordinary messenger from the other world to persuade us to all this?

2. To the *reason* of the thing add the *reasons* and *considerations* with which the *scriptures* will furnish us for repentance, and *helps* to it, and then say whether these are not sufficient. *They have Moses and the prophets, let them bear them.* The *Jews* had no other scriptures but those of the Old Testament; and these being ¹ *given by inspiration of God, were profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* They were *profitable* for all these ends, *i. e.* in themselves excellently fitted to answer them; and if they did not, in all these respects, profit those to whom these *lively*

! 2 Tim. iii. 16.

oracles were committed, 'twas because they were not ^m moved with faith, or with serious consideration in them who received them; or from some other such like cause. The deficiency was not on the side of the scriptures: in these God had shewn them what was good, and what the Lord their God required of them. The terms of acceptance were plainly revealed, nor had they the least ground to hope that God would be favourable to them, if they did not comply with these terms, or to fear the contrary if they did. That God *alike* regarded the righteous and the wicked, the language of their scriptures, from one end of them to the other, would not suffer them to think; and not regarding them *alike*, they could not reasonably believe that he would treat them after the same manner. That the *righteous should finally be as the wicked*, or the wicked as the righteous, is impossible, if God loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity; and has farther declared, that he will reward the one and punish the other. And therefore there was very good reason for referring men to the law and the prophets at that time; since if they heard these so as to listen to and obey their instructions, they could not but be preserved from wilful sin; or, having sinned, could not but be led to repentance. And if we

^m Heb. iv. 2.

we bring the matter over to the *christian revelation*, this argument from the sufficiency of the ordinary means will appear in a yet stronger light. Is the question, how we shall reclaim men from a vicious life, and persuade them to embrace a life of strict piety and universal goodness? *Let them hear Christ and his apostles.* The discourses of *Christ* are recorded by his *apostles*; and under the inspiration of the Spirit they have explain'd and fill'd up the whole plan of the gospel-revelation. And now (I will not say what *good* and *plausible*) but, what *tolerable* plea can persons have, professing the gospel, for their impenitency? Want of knowledge, or encouragement, or power, cannot be justly pleaded; since they have the whole counsel of God declared to them for their direction: the glory of God, and the happiness of eternity set before them as their reward; and the Spirit of God promised them to sanctify, assist, and comfort them. And to the end all these excellent means might not prove ineffectual, by mens not looking into the bible, and being diverted from the consideration of spiritual things by the cares and pleasures of life; God has mercifully appointed an order of men, whose stated business it is to awaken peoples attention to the doctrines, and commands, and promises, and threatnings of the gospel; to ⁿ *instruct*

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the ignorant, to warn the unruly, to help the weak, to encourage and animate the sincere, and to beseech sinners in Christ's stead to be reconciled unto God: infomuch that the word of salvation is brought home to them, and they cannot sin, but it must be wilfully; nor continue impenitent, but because they are obstinately set upon their evil ways. And when this is the case, must they have one sent to them from the dead to warn them of their danger, which is otherwise so visible; and to excite in them serious thoughts of God, of their souls, of a judgment to come, and of heaven and hell, which they could not but have if they did not run away from them? With how little reason any such method for the recovering men to repentance can be proposed or expected, when the ordinary means are so abundantly sufficient, appears at first sight.

2. *THERE is little hope where these ordinary means fail of their effect, that men would be savingly wrought upon by the extraordinary method here proposed; which is a farther proof of the unreasonableness of any such proposal. If they hear not Moses and the prophets, and much more if they regard not the admonitions of Christ and his apostles, neither would they be persuaded to forsake their beloved sins, tho' one rose from the dead. Which is not to be taken in the utmost*

most strictness of the expression, as if there would be no instances of persons reclaimed by this method if it was generally used: it only signifies, that judging of the matter according to the *nature* and *reason* of things, this would be the *usual* effect; especially with regard to such persons as are represented by the *rich man's five brethren*, men immersed in earthliness and sensuality, abandoned and enslaved to their lusts, and far advanced in a wicked course of life. There is too much ground to think that even a messenger *from the dead*, sent to *testify* to them that they *might not come into the place of torment*, would not be able to persuade persons of this character thoroughly to amend their ways and their doings. For,

I. THIS could not be expected from the *thing testified*. Shall he *testify* that there is another life besides this, in which men are happy or miserable, according to the state in which death finds them? but this they are supposed to believe already without any such witness. They are persuaded of the truth of a future state, and of the difference in the conditions of good and bad men there; and what occasion then for such an extraordinary testimony concerning the same things? If it be said, *that they may believe them more firmly*: I answer, that the strongest persuasion of the truth of these things, with-

out a serious consideration of them, would not do; and that for the same reason as they cannot be persuaded to consider and meditate upon these things now, neither would they do it, tho' they had a stronger belief of them. Shall this messenger from the dead not only testify to them that the righteous and the wicked are placed in different abodes; those in *Abraham's bosom*, these in a *place of torment*; but that such and such of their relations, and friends, or acquaintance, are in a state of happiness or misery? this too they might know, or conjecture, with a great deal of probability, from the life which they led. And if the death of a pious friend or relative, of whose happiness they have good hope; or of one of a contrary character, concerning whom they have equal ground to fear, is of little or no force to make them enter upon a new life; why should it be imagined that hearing from the other world of their happiness or misery would work an effectual change upon them?

2. NEITHER will the *person testifying*, or the *nature and manner of the testimony*, afford any ground of *assurance* that his *message* would be *effectual*. It must be owned, there would be something very *awful* in the vision of such an envoy from the invisible world, and the warning given by him; and that

men would probably be very much alarmed and affected by it for some time; but then, besides that they might be apt afterwards to question whether the vision was real, even tho' they believed the immortality of the soul, and a future state of recompences, imputing what had happen'd to a disorder in their brain; besides this, the impressiion would not be long in wearing off again. They would be very much moved for the time, so as to take up resolutions of leading another kind of life; and are they not thus moved, tho' perhaps not so strongly upon *other* occasions? Does not a sermon strike them, or a providence make a very great impressiion upon them; and yet what is the consequence? The tide of passion, which for the present was retired, comes in again with violence, and hurries them away with it. They meet with their old temptations, and know not how to resist them; are drawn aside by their own lusts, or by vain company, and enticed, and so all these promising beginnings come to nothing. And thus we may conceive it would generally be as to that concern and emotion of mind, which the sight of one returning from the dead would raise in them. This concern and emotion would gradually pass away, and with that the effect produced by it: the change would not be very lasting. True

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repentance is not a thing into which men are to be *frighted*: a fright may make them *abstain* from the outward practice of sin for a time; but this is not repentance unto life, which implies an *inward* hatred and detestation of sin, and the forsaking it *universally, constantly, and from principle*.

3. MANY of the same things which hinder men's repentance *now*, would hinder it *then*, holding good after they have received such a message, if they did so before. Let me only mention two; one is a *false* notion of repentance, the other is a *vain* promise which they make themselves, that they will repent some time or *other hereafter*.

1. WE may suppose of multitudes that they do not *really* repent, because they have a *false* notion of repentance; and so fancy they have repented of their sins when they have not. They place repentance in confessing sin, taking up resolutions against it; in strong convictions, reluctance and struggles of conscience; in lamenting themselves, and crying, *O wretched man that I am!* in sensible workings of affection; in practising some abstinences and mortifications, and performing some external acts of devotion: if they do these, and such like things, they think they have discharged the duty of repentance, and are as good christians as it is absolutely necessary they should be; tho' they are continually relapsing into the same
fins,

sins, and never thoroughly subdue and heartily renounce any one favourite lust. And with the *same* false notion they would be apt to cheat themselves, if one was sent to them from the *dead* to warn them to repent. Whereas before this, they were, it may be, harden'd and secure in their sins, and seldom or never troubled themselves with thoughts about their condition ; they would now feel these inward emotions, and do these actions which I before described ; and this they would call repentance, and deeming this to be true repentance, would never proceed any farther.

2. ANOTHER thing which hinders men's repentance, is a *foolish promise* they make themselves, that they will *repent* some *time* or *other hereafter* : and I doubt by this fallacy greater numbers have been fatally deceived than by the other. Exhort them to repent ; their answer is, that they intend *no* other : 'tis what they are resolved upon ; but what necessity is there of entring upon such an unacceptable work yet ? Can't they enjoy the pleasures of this life, and the next too ; gratify their inclinations first, and then when they have run through a course of sensual indulgences, and their relish for the delights of sin is worn off, apply themselves to the mortifying duties of repentance, hearken to the voice of conscience, make their peace with God, and
prepare

prepare for their everlasting state? These are *idle* thoughts; but with such thoughts as these, *thousands* and *ten thousands* have cheated and betrayed themselves into everlasting ruin. And should God vouchsafe to warn them to repent by a messenger from *the dead*, as he has done in his word, would they not be still liable to the same snare? They might form purposes of amendment, and their purposes might have some effect; but when they found what a difficulty there was in breaking off from their sins, and that a thorough change was not to be effected without a great deal of self-denial, and perpetual caution and watchfulness; they would be ready to say to themselves, can't I delay the matter a little longer? perhaps hereafter I shall be in a better disposition for this solemn affair, and meet with fewer obstructions and temptations to divert me from it; or at worst, shall have time enough to secure heaven, when I can keep my lusts no longer. And thus passing their lives in ineffective resolutions to repent, which they *delay* to execute one time after another, they would at last be surprized by the summons of death, and go out of the world impenitent. To add no more,

4. *MATTER of fact* in cases of a *resembling* nature, will help us to judge of the little success to be look'd for from this particular

particular method of one *sent from the dead*. When *Saul* ° just before the battle in which he fell, consulted with a woman at *Endor* who had a familiar spirit; tho' he verily thought that she had brought up *Samuel* to him from the state of departed souls, and that the prophet talked to him, and reproved and threatned him; and he was so strongly moved and shocked by it, as to *fall all along upon the earth, and to be sore afraid*; yet we find not that it any way bettered and softned his spirit, so as to make him humble himself before God, and implore his forgiveness with a broken penitent heart: he was the *same* bad man still, only made more desperate, and rushes headlong to his fate. The miracle performed by our blessed Saviour upon another, *P Lazarus*, whom he raised from the dead, (which perhaps he alludes to in this parable) had an effect upon some quite opposite to that of repentance; for not being able to deny the miracle, instead of yielding themselves to the conviction which it carried along with it, the *Pharisees* consulted together how they should put this excellent person to death, and even *Lazarus* also; for no other cause, but that the people were honester than themselves, and by reason of this miracle, *went away and believed on Jesus*. And what could be a greater miracle

° 1 Sam. xxviii. 14.

P John xi. 47.

racle than that of our Lord's own resurrection? or better attested? his worst enemies were not able to disprove it, but they did not therefore cease to be his enemies, many of them at least; but pursued his memory, and cause, and disciples, with the same implacable malice as they had done his person when he conversed among them. The case of persons lying as they apprehend upon the *brink of another world*, and just going to mingle with the dead, and afterwards returning to the *world*, and to their *sins* again, is a very common one. They could not be more terrified with the appearance of a departed soul, than they are with the thoughts of their just leaving the body themselves, and entering upon an everlasting state; the prospect of which, from a sick-bed, is most frightful: nor could they more sincerely resolve to sacrifice every lust, than they do at such a time if God shall spare them. God does spare them, and they spare their lusts, by little and little, as health and strength return; they forget their sick-bed promises, 'till at length all that passed at that awful season is vanished as a dream: and it would be no other if such persons had a messenger expressly sent them from the *dead*. Let me now apply this subject.

I. LET us be *thankful* for the calls to repentance, which we have by the *word*, and
provi-

providence, and *Spirit of God*, and the means and opportunities of exercising it; and instead of talking what we would do, if we had other means which we have not, let us set ourselves to improve those which we have. They who are most inclined to dictate to the Governour of the world what he should do, finding fault with the management of things, because extraordinary methods are not used, and messengers dispatched from the other world to warn men to repent; these very persons do not *really desire* that any more should be done than is done; nay, they would be glad if God did *less* for them, that they might have more to say in their own excuse. A man could not in earnest desire such and such means and advantages for repentance, without being in a disposition to repent; and if he was well disposed to repent, he would reckon the invitations and helps he enjoyed already more than barely sufficient, and with all readiness embrace them. Let us particularly be thankful for the aids of the Holy Spirit, which are afforded us in order to render the outward means more effectual, and which, if improved as they ought to be, shall be granted in still greater degrees. Did men reflect on this as they ought, and think how often they have had good thoughts, which instead of cherishing, they have done all they

they could to stifle; and sometimes resolutions, which not being able wholly to avoid, they have deferred executing to an uncertain hereafter; did they seriously think of these things, they would see they had more reason to complain of themselves, than of God. God has not been wanting to give them means, and helps, and opportunities, both external and internal; but they have been inexcusably wanting in the use and improvement which they ought to have made of them.

2. LET us get *well-instructed* in the nature of *true* repentance, as a *thorough change of heart and life*, placing the affections upon new objects, and governing the conversation by new rules. Repentance is not a *short* and *faint* combat with temptations, but *victory* over them. 'Tis not barely *sorrowing* for sin, when we are groaning under the penal effects of it; but to *hate* and *forsake* it: in a word, 'tis ^a *ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well*; not so as to be *ever learning* and *never come* to the uniform practice of piety and goodness. Right notions of repentance will keep you from those false judgments of yourselves, and of your state, which have ruined thousands; who never returned into the right way, because they thought they were in it already. The reason therefore of their

^a Isai. i. 16, 17.

their continuing impenitent, is not a defect in the outward means, but a false notion of repentance. Here they are to begin, laying as the foundation, just and true apprehensions of this great change : for such it is with regard to those who have abandon'd themselves to their vices. The revolution in the tempers and lives of such persons must be very remarkable, before they can be ranked in the number of true penitents. The hatred of sin, the shame, and sorrow, and indignation raised by reflections upon their past behaviour, must be very sensibly felt by them, and give them so much disquiet and uneasiness, as to imbitter to them all their sinful pleasures, and thereby prevent their returning to them. They must break off their old habits, forbear what they most delightfully practised, and practise what they had the greatest aversion to ; till they come by time and use to practise it with delight. If once they had *this* notion of repentance, they would soon have *another* notion of *themselves* ; and finding they were as yet far from being the persons they ought to be, they would be more uneasy with themselves, and by that means be more strongly urged to become better.

3. OFTEN and seriously reflect on the wisdom of *repenting immediately*, and the extreme folly of *delaying* it. The Jews express

press this point of instruction under the following *parabolical* story of one *Simeon*, who repented and was translated to paradise, while his acquaintance were thrust down into the regions of darkness; where complaining of God as if he had a respect of persons, he tells them in answer, that *Simeon* had repented, which they had not. Only receive us to mercy, say they, and we will repent too. No, saith God again, there is no repentance after the day of death. *Rabbi Eleazar* therefore would say, that men ought to repent *one day before their death*: upon which his disciples asking him, and when shall we die? he replied, the hour of death is uncertain; and for that reason we ought to repent *to-day*, because we may die to-morrow. And indeed nothing sets the necessity of a speedy repentance in a clearer and more affecting light, than this uncertainty of human life. Now we may repent; but if we lay not hold of this opportunity we may never have another. And instead of lessening, the longer we continue in sin, the difficulties attending a change of life will become greater and greater. And would any one, when his prison-door stands open, and the chains by which he is held are lighter, foolishly cry, *yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep*; and not rather joyfully embrace the

means

means of life and liberty, before he is loaded with heavier fetters, the door shut upon him, and there is no hope of redemption. So it was with the *rich man* in the *parable*; his condition being fixed, he makes a proposal about the repentance of his brethren, who were still living; but saith nothing of his own, because he knew it would be in vain.

4. IN order to impress our minds the more deeply with the sense of these things, let us *frequently look* into that *invisible* world, the different abodes of which are represented in this *parable*. Why should we be so wholly taken up with present things? have we not the power of thinking about things which are not present to the senses? 'Tis plain we have, and that we frequently exercise this faculty about distant places and things upon this earth. And if the objects surrounding us do not so fasten down our minds to them, but we can, by the force of imagination, represent what scenes we please to ourselves with which we are sometimes so taken up as hardly to regard what we see or hear; why can't we abstract our thoughts from all the things of time and sense, in order to fix them on the things of eternity? The reason of this is, not that the nature of these things renders it *impossible* for us to meditate about them; for we see that a

great many do so, and by such meditations become superior to all the temptations of the present life. The true reason therefore is, our *preferring* this world to the next. Now this wrong *preference* is the very thing of which we ought to cure ourselves; and which we should soon rectify, if we would but spend some time in a serious survey of our own nature, and of the different states of existence for which we are designed.

“ Shortly I shall be with persons who lived
“ and died as the *rich man* did; or with
“ pious persons like *Lazarus*, comforted be-
“ yond all expression, or *tormented*. O what
“ is this dream of life! as to the greater
“ part of mankind, 'tis no more than a
“ dream. They are tossed between hopes
“ and fears, and joys and sorrows, and
“ thoughts and prospects, which have little
“ more reality and substance in them than
“ visionary entertainments of the night. Let
“ the *dream* be never so *pleasant*, it must *end*
“ at last; and when it is over, O! the
“ dreadful surprize of those who *dream* of
“ *happiness*, and *awake* to *misery*. Wise and
“ happy they! who, considering that the
“ chief, and in a manner, only value of
“ this life, lies in its being an opportunity
“ to prepare for endless felicity, can heartily
“ despise all the alluring baits of vice, are
“ contented to be poor and afflicted, or any
“ thing

“ thing else that nature most abhors, so they
 “ are but truly virtuous and good, the faith-
 “ ful and beloved disciples of Christ, the
 “ children of God, and heirs of eternal
 “ glory. The scene will quickly, very quick-
 “ ly shift, and every good man be happy,
 “ every wicked man miserable.” O Sirs!
 did we meditate as we should upon these
 awful, these important subjects, it would be
 impossible for us to live as too many of us
 now do. When we consider’d *repentance* as
 the *condition* of avoiding such misery, and
 securing such happiness, we should look
 upon it as a very reasonable and easy one;
 and not neglect one moment longer to lay
 hold on that eternal life which is offered us
 in Christ Jesus our Lord.



School room 175. August 6. 1837.



S E R M O N XI.

Instances of a fatal Inconsideration.

ISAIAH i. 3.

----- *My people doth not consider.*

THE title of this prophecy, contained in ver. 1. expresses the general design of it: *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziab, Jotham, Abaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.* During the successive reigns of all which princes, the prophet was employed as the messenger of God to the people of the Jews, to exhort them to repentance; and, in failure of that, to denounce the judgments of God against them. And yet tho' the message be to them, he first turns himself to the creation around, and calls upon the *heavens* and the *earth* to judge, as it were, *betwixt God and his people*; whose ingratitude and stupidity were so amazingly

amazingly great, that the *prophet* cannot forbear expressing himself, as if all nature must be affected with it, and declare against it: *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.* Brute creatures are taught to act better by *instinct*, than they are by their *reason*. In vain is the superiority of their nature, which makes them capable of judging concerning their duty and their interest; of reflecting on things past, and looking forward to things to come; in vain all the privileges which they enjoy, not only above other creatures, but beyond the rest of mankind: all this is to no purpose; they have behaved as if they did not know me, and their obligations to me, and were not capable of this knowledge. And to what must this be ascribed? the answer is contained in these words: *My people doth not consider.* It was for want of *consideration* that the nation of the *Jews* so often brought themselves into the most calamitous circumstances; and at last drew upon themselves the most terrible, and a sort of final destruction. And the *same* cause has the *like* effect with regard to *all* who sin, and suffer for their sins, *here* or *hereafter*.

I SHALL treat of the *charge* here brought against the ancient *Jews* in a double view.

I. As it more *especially* concerns *impenitent sinners*. And

II. As in a *lesser* degree it too frequently affects persons of *sincere piety*. As to the *former*, 'tis their very *character*, that they *do not*, and *will not consider*. As to the *latter*, 'tis what they are guilty of upon *some occasions*, and in *lesser* instances, and of which they accordingly feel the unhappy consequences in this life.

I. 'TIS the *proper character* of all the *impenitent*, all who continue in a state of sin, that they *do not* and *will not consider*. This is the ground of their guilt, and the fatal cause of their ruin. *Consideration* is the same as *attentively applying* the mind to things, according to their respective nature and importance, in order to our having the clearer apprehension of them, and knowing how we ought to act in relation to them. This is the general notion of *consideration*. And forasmuch as the things of religion are of the highest nature, and the utmost conceivable importance; our considering these things, must imply our looking into them, and pondering them with the greatest care, and seriousness, and impartiality; and
this

this with a view of our being able to form a truer and more distinct judgment concerning them, and concerning the manner in which they ought to influence our actions; to the end we may be effectually led and determined to act as we ought, and as the nature and importance of the things should persuade us to do. We must attend *carefully*, examine *impartially*, think and reflect *seriously*, that we may *judge*, and *resolve*, and *act rightly*. But can it be said of the generality of mankind, of all who are not to be prevailed upon to break off from their sins by a thorough repentance and reformation of life, and to devote themselves to the practice of universal piety and goodness; can it be said of these, that while they neglect other duties, they practise this of *consideration*? No certainly: 'tis evident from the whole manner of their conduct, evident to the whole world who make any observation on persons and things, that they *do not consider*. Here I shall

1. AMONG a great many things of the *highest importance*, instance in some *particulars*, which 'tis manifest the persons I am now speaking of, *do not consider*.

2. SET before you the *deplorable consequences* of this *refusal*, or *neglect to consider*.

1. AMONG a great many things of the *highest importance*, I shall for example's sake,

instance in some *particulars*, which 'tis manifest all who continue in a state of *unrepented* sin, *do not consider*.

I. *THEY do not consider* what their own *reason* and the holy *scripture* would instruct them in concerning *God*, his *being* and *providence*, his *attributes* and *works*. ^a *The wicked thro' the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.* All his thoughts which he encourages and pursues are turned another way. He sees a world of creatures about him, he cannot but see and observe them in some manner: he knows he was not the author of his own being, as neither could they be the author of theirs, or one of the others, without a *first cause*, from whence they all proceeded; and yet he saith not seriously and deliberately: ^b “ *Where is God my maker,*
“ *and the maker of all other things? where*
“ *and what is he? He who made all things,*
“ *must he not be in all places? can he operate*
“ *where he is not? He is indeed an invisible*
“ *being; but that is because he is a spiritual*
“ *or incorporeal being, without all body, or*
“ *any such distinct and separable parts as body*
“ *consists of. Were he not a spirit, he could*
“ *not be omnipresent.* ^c *In him I, and all my*
“ *fellow creatures, live, and move, and have*
“ *our*

^a Psal. x. 4.
^c Acts xvii. 28.

^b Job xxxv. 10.

“ *our being.* He is the ^d *Father of my spirit,*
“ *my soul, my immortal part ; he supports*
“ *my life ; he gave and he continues my*
“ *reason and all my other faculties ; his*
“ *providence extends to all my actions ; his*
“ *eye is upon all my ways.* He is a *most*
“ *perfect being, all perfect, infinitely per-*
“ *fect ; possessed of every kind and every*
“ *degree of perfection, moral as well as na-*
“ *tural and intellectual ; holy, just, merciful*
“ *and true, as well as immense, eternal.*
“ *all-wise and all-powerful.* ^e *He is gra-*
“ *cious and long-suffering, abundant in good-*
“ *ness and truth ; keeping mercy for thousands,*
“ *forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin ; yet*
“ *will by no means clear the guilty.* ^f *Of purer*
“ *eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on*
“ *iniquity, so as ever to approve it, or those*
“ *who practise it.* No sinner ^g *shall stand*
“ *in his sight ; he cannot suffer presump-*
“ *tuous sin, not repented of, to go unpun-*
“ *ished : he hateth all the workers of ini-*
“ *quity, and has ^h sworn that no disobedient,*
“ *refractory sinner shall enter into his rest.*
“ *And has he sworn, and will he not per-*
“ *form it ? his word cannot fall to the*
“ *ground ; his threatnings like his promises*
“ *are sure.*” --- Every man’s *reason*, did he
consult it free from prejudice, as well as the
sacred scripture, would inform him of all
this.

^d Heb. xii. 9. ^e Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. ^f Hab. i. 13.
^g Psal. v. 5. ^h Psal. xciv. 11.

this. But O how few appear to consider it! or rather what multitudes appear not to consider it! How seldom have careless impenitent sinners a thought of the invisible God? how seldom do they make mention of him, unless in swearing profanely by his name? If at any time they make these things the subject of their inquiries, 'tis rather to gratify their curiosity, or that they may be able to talk upon the subject, or perhaps to find out objections against them; than with any serious and good purpose. They do not *consider* these truths in their practical consequences, and the use which should be made of them.

2. THEY do *not consider the end* for which they were *made*, and what is their *true interest* and *highest happiness*. This is a most important question, of absolute necessity to regulate human life; for as our end is, such will the course of our actions be in pursuance of it. Agreeably to the notions which we have of our principal interest, we shall frame our designs, and shape our conduct; but, alas! among those who live regardless of God, and their duty to him, who are they who ask themselves this question, or who ask it with any real desire and view to satisfy themselves in the truth of it? If they think and talk upon this subject, 'tis more for a trial of their wit, than for any thing else; and accordingly, as they very seldom meddle

meddle at all with it, so when they do, 'tis in too careless and indifferent a manner, (without applying their minds closely to the thing, or the thing to themselves and their own condition) to deserve the name of *consideration*. -- " Did God make *me* for no " *higher* end than the *beasts* of the field? is " my happiness and theirs the *same*? if so, " would he have given me such excellent " faculties, faculties so greatly disproportioned to so low an end? would not a *less* " degree of reason and understanding have " done *better*, as it would have been sufficient to direct me in the pursuit of a sensual felicity, without reproaching me at " the same time with the meanness of my " choice? is not my *soul*, as it is *rational*, " *immortal* too? and can my *principal* concern then lie in *this* life? does an *immortal* soul suit with things which are all of " them *transient* and *dying*? How absurd is " this, that *my own duration* should be *everlasting*; and that of *my happiness*, my proper happiness, be but *for a moment*!" Ah! how were it to be wished, that men could be persuaded to think and reason after this manner! then would they quickly perceive they were designed for nobler purposes, than those which the greater part of mankind pursue with most heat and eagerness. They would perceive, that being made in the *image* of *God*, they could be made for no
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2. THEY do *not consider the end* for which they were *made*, and what is their *true interest* and *highest happiness*. This is a most important question, of absolute necessity to regulate human life; for as our end is, such will the course of our actions be in pursuance of it. Agreeably to the notions which we have of our principal interest, we shall frame our designs, and shape our conduct; but, alas! among those who live regardless of God, and their duty to him, who are they who ask themselves this question, or who ask it with any real desire and view to satisfy themselves in the truth of it? If they think and talk upon this subject, 'tis more for a trial of their wit, than for any thing else; and accordingly, as they very seldom meddle

meddle at all with it, so when they do, 'tis in too careless and indifferent a manner, (without applying their minds closely to the thing, or the thing to themselves and their own condition) to deserve the name of *consideration*. -- † “ Did God make *me* for no “ *higher* end than the *beasts* of the field? is “ my happiness and theirs the *same*? if so, “ would he have given me such excellent “ faculties, faculties so greatly disproportioned to so low an end? would not a *less* “ degree of reason and understanding have “ done *better*, as it would have been sufficient to direct me in the pursuit of a sensual felicity, without reproaching me at “ the same time with the meanness of my “ choice? is not my *soul*, as it is *rational*, “ *immortal* too? and can my *principal* concern then lie in *this* life? does an *immortal* soul suit with things which are all of “ them *transient* and *dying*? How absurd is “ this, that *my own duration* should be ever- “ *lasting*; and that of *my happiness*, my proper happiness, be but *for a moment*!” Ah! how were it to be wished, that men could be persuaded to think and reason after this manner! then would they quickly perceive they were designed for nobler purposes, than those which the greater part of mankind pursue with most heat and eagerness. They would perceive, that being made in the *image* of *God*, they could be made for no end

end inferior to that of glorifying and enjoying him : they would perceive and acknowledge it to be their *wisdom* to please, and fear, and serve God; their *interest* to gain his favour; their *supreme happiness* to have admission into his immediate glorious presence, and the most perfect intercourse with him. Would they but reflect and consider, such observations as these could not escape them; they could never imagine a wise God would send them into the world, so amply furnished, and so honourably distinguish'd, only to follow their pleasures; or to act the part of the *dog* or the *swine*, the *fox* or the *lion*, the *ant* or the *mole*; to resemble this or that animal, just as the passions they happened to be led by resembled the passions and instincts of those several creatures. Being *men*, they would be sensible it was their business to *shew themselves men*, to live like men, to seek the happiness of men. But what shall we say? tho' they *have* reason, they will not *use* it; tho' they are *able* to *consider*, and therein distinguish'd from inferior creatures, yet they *do not consider*; and are therein far beneath them.)

3. THEY *do not consider* the *infinite obligations* they are under to that God whose commands they disobey. This is the particular ground and instance of the allegation against the people of *Judah*: God had

nourished

nourished and brought them up as children, but they did not consider it; which makes the prophet complain to the heavens and the earth as witnesses against them. The thing was the more inexcusable, because those shadows and imitations of thought and gratitude which are to be found in creatures incapable of reasoning, did as it were reproach them with their insensibility. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. They had not the sense to perceive the hand which fed them, or did not *consider* it; as if they had been sunk below those of the creatures which are used as common emblems of dulness and stupidity. And the same is the case of all who refuse to lead a virtuous and religious life. They are ungrateful to God, because they do not *consider* as they ought their constant and necessary dependence upon him, and the numberless proofs and instances of his tender goodness and compassion towards them. " O my soul! stop and think
" a little against whom thou art so often
" offending; thy best friend, thy most unwearied benefactor: that every sin thou
" committest is an abuse of the richest
" grace and mercy. The mercy of God
" towards thee, O my soul, had no other
" beginning but that of thine existence;
" has

“ has flow'd on with that, and supplied a
“ succession of favours, as numerous and
“ uninterrupted as the moments of which
“ my life has been made up ! While I
“ have been sinning against God, what else
“ has he been doing but heaping his benefits
“ upon me, to awaken me if possible to a
“ sense of my duty, and overcome my
“ resistance of his gracious intentions to-
“ wards me ! How much has God done for
“ me in my *creation*, in giving me so ex-
“ cellent a nature, such excellent and vast
“ capacities ! in my *preservation*, guarding
“ and helping my weakness, relieving my
“ indigence, maintaining my health, or
“ healing my diseases ; multiplying my joys,
“ mitigating my sorrows, and sustaining me
“ under my burdens ! in my *redemption*,
“ vouchsafing me the means and the aids
“ of grace, and the hope of eternal glory !
“ Couldst thou have considered this, O my
“ soul, and not have been excited to re-
“ turns of obedience and love to thy boun-
“ tiful benefactor ; the God who has fed
“ thee all thy life long, and is willing to
“ bestow everlasting blessings upon thee ?
“ Think of it now tho' late, and be con-
“ founded at the sight of thy monstrous
“ ingratitude.”

4. THEY who are not reclaimed from
their evil courses, do *not consider* the *vast*
importance

importance of salvation, and what the indispensable terms of it are. 'Tis plain, 'tis undeniable they do not; for they could not then neglect so great salvation; they could not then prefer every trifle to this grand affair. To be sav'd, in the scripture-notion of that word, is to be delivered from the wrath to come, from eternal death and destruction: and did they ever seriously consider what this wrath means? what a dreadful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God? what it is to be doom'd to everlasting punishment? for ever excluded from the blissful presence of God? and, together with that, banished from all comfort, and from all hope? how wretched, how insupportable such a condition must be? how terrible without the addition of eternity, much more where that comes in like an infinite weight to press down all the rest? Eternity! little does the careless sinner think what is wrapt up in this single word: did he think of thee, his pleasures would immediately turn sour, as liquors which have no strength in them do in the midst of thunder and lightning, and his heart die within him. Yet, farther, to be sav'd, is, instead of being miserable, to be made happy, perfectly and for ever happy: and what it is to be thus happy, it is equally impossible for us to form a clear and just conception;

as

as having but a tolerable conception of it, and revolving it often in our minds, it is to slight and disregard this happiness, and sacrifice it to the pleasures of sin. And what now are the *gospel-terms* of salvation? we cannot but acknowledge it *reasonable* that he who bestows this salvation should appoint the *terms* of it; and *certain*, that the *terms* being *settled* by infinite wisdom and goodness, are the *best* and *fittest* that can be; nor can we without the greatest folly imagine, that after God hath *fixed* certain *terms*, he will *depart* from them, and save men in any other way than that which he hath revealed to them; only to gratify their sinful prejudices, and humours, and inclinations. Can it be suppos'd that these persons ever seriously *considered* this, that the *terms* of salvation are *indispensable*, and never to be brought lower than they are already, who never troubled themselves to comply with them? the *terms* of salvation are *low* indeed in comparison of the *greatness* of the reward to be conferred, and in the judgment of every considerate person; but not so low as too many are apt to fancy. They are as low as any reasonable ingenuous mind can desire; but not so low as the sensualist and worldling would wish. They would be glad to have heaven when they can keep the earth no longer,
without

without seeking it; to be sav'd and made happy, if it might be, without parting with a single lust. But this cannot be. *Repentance* and *faith* are the conditions to which the promise of life and salvation is made; ^h *repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ: a repentance from dead works, implying an abhorrence of all sin, as sin, and the practice of all virtue and godliness; such must our repentance be, to be a ⁱ repentance unto life: a faith which overcomes the world: (^k for who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the son of God?) and ^l works by love to God and man.* (Such a repentance, and such a faith, are not very common; I doubt, I might have said, are exceeding rare: which seems to argue, that men do not always consider them as the necessary and unalterable terms of life and happiness; tho' it must be confess'd, when it serves the sinner's turn, he can plead the strictness of these terms as his excuse for not living up to them. So contradictory is he in his pleas. Sometimes his apology is, that the *law is spiritual, and he is carnal, and so he cannot do the things which he would; he cannot, if he would never so fain, become a new creature.* At

^h Acts iii. 19. xvi. 31. xx. 21. Heb. vi. 1.

ⁱ 2 Cor. vii. 10. ^k 1 John v. 5. ^l Gal. v. 6.

other times the gospel is a law of grace; and ^m *because grace abounds*, nay, that it may abound, he may venture to *continue in sin*. And this, I doubt, is the rock on which the greatest numbers split, for want of soberly considering what they must do to be saved; the *necessity* of holiness being *apparent* to those who consider it, and the *wisdom* of it to those who consider its necessity.

5. THE same persons *do not consider* the *nature* and *tendency* of their *present* course of life. They do not reflect upon their actions, and weigh and ponder their steps. They have not the caution of common travellers, to think whether they are right or wrong. "How came I into this road? whither does it lead? who directed me to take it? what company have I in it? wise men or fools? men used to think soberly, or the contrary?" Too many do not love to enquire, and think; thinking is their aversion: they would not be set right, do not care to alter their method of living, and are therefore willing to *suppose* it such as it should be, if not in all respects, yet in all things essential. I say, they are *willing* to *suppose* this, but at the same time *conscious* that the matter will not *bear* examination; that their cause is bad, their title to the peace they enjoy, false and deceitful; and this makes them

them shun the trial of sound reason. Therefore 'tis, that conscience is not suffered to speak out; ⁿ *they hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reprov'd.*

Man! is not this the truth? is it not thus thou impostest upon thyself? Thou dar'est not appeal to thy own mind, thou dar'est not trust the matter to that issue; no, thou dar'est not: and what can be a plainer confession of a bad cause? what can be more pitiful and mean than for men to *allow* themselves to *do* what they have not the *confidence* to *look back* upon when done? what more reproachful, than to be afraid of our own thoughts? what more suspicious, than for reasonable creatures to decline the bar of reason? what more shameful, than for those who have understanding, not to be able or willing to give an account of their actions to themselves? Sinner! be plain with thyself, and give me leave to deal plainly with thee. If thou wer't not ashamed of thyself, why, in the name of the all-knowing God, shouldst thou shun conversing with thyself? If all were well at home, what should make thee so fond of rambling abroad, and, as it were, losing the remembrance of thyself in a crowd of vain amusements? Here, sinner, here is the true, the main cause of thy love of noise and hurry, of tiresome business,

Y 2

business, or of mean pleasures, and perpetual diversions; thy aim is, by this means, to make thy escape from thyself; to employ and divert thy mind, that it may not be forced upon the ungrateful consideration of thy way and manner of life from thy youth up, which thou must know not to be justifiable. How men can be satisfied with such a state of mind, and with such a distracted senseless way of spending life, is hard to imagine; 'tis a strange slavery they are under, a difficult task they have upon their hands, to be obliged to fly from themselves. If these men are happy, I must own myself to have no notion at all what happiness means.

6. *THEY do not consider the uncertainty of life.* They manage, as if they were never to die; or as if death were at a very great distance from them, when they do not know but they may die to-morrow, or that *° this very night their souls may be required of them.* For what is life, but a little breath in our nostrils? the momentary pulsation of the heart? and how soon may this pulse be stop'd, this breath be taken away? and then we return to our dust. O ye careless unconcerned sinners, who prodigally throw away your precious time, and, as it were, dance upon the brink of destruction; can
you

you say you consider this, that you *must* shortly die, and *may* die *suddenly*? alas! death is what of all things persons of your character put farthest, or would put farthest from their thoughts: and they may possibly drive it from their *thoughts*, but 'tis never the farther for that from *themselves*. Could we but once prevail with men to look to the ground they stand upon, to observe how it shakes under them, to reflect how precarious their abode is in this world, to consider that they are *to-day warm in health*, and when a *few* days more are *past*, may be *cold* and withering in the grave; could we persuade them to admit of such thoughts as these, and withal to add, with this life there's an end to all seasons and opportunities of grace, of all their designs and projects for time and eternity; certainly we should have no difficulty to persuade them farther to take up resolutions of leading a new course of life, and turning their feet to the divine testimonies. And why will they not consider this? can they protract life by not thinking of death? is their danger ever the less for their not attending to it? Consider, mortal, thy times are in the hands of another, not thine own; thou art not lord of thine own life, any more than the original author of it: he that gave thee life, does when he pleases, resume what he

Y 3 gave,

gave ; and many are the provocations he daily receives from thee to put an end to a life, which thou makest very little use of but to his dishonour. And *when* he will do this, or in *what manner* he will do it, thou canst not tell : whether by some unforeseen accident, or by a bodily disease ; and whether this disease shall be acute or lingering, tormenting or stupifying ; all this is unknown to thee : there's a dark cloud between thee and futurity, which thou art not able to penetrate. And should not this teach thee to be wise ? it would infallibly do it, didst thou *consider thy latter end* ; that these things must all have an end, and that thou may'st be just arrived at that end. The consideration of this in thy cool and retired hours would alarm thee, and put thee upon thinking what sort of behaviour is most suitable to a creature who lives at such uncertainties.

7. *They do not consider the certainty of a world to come.* That world is *unseen* ; they never had any acquaintance with it themselves, and *never any returned* from thence to give them an account of it, and therefore they would fain believe there is no such world, no such future state of being, or that possibly there may not. They please themselves with this *peradventure*, and with the help of it make a shift to lull themselves
asleep

asleep in their sins : whereas in case it were a mere *peradventure*, which it is not, an uncertainty whether there was any life to come after death, no wise man would therefore think himself justified to act upon such uncertainty. If the *negative*, or that there is no world to come, were *certain*, then indeed there would be little or no absurdity in a loose ungoverned course of life, in casting off the fear of an after-reckoning, and all the restraints of religion by which we are abridged in any of our pleasures : such a way of acting as this, would be much more accountable, were we sure that we should die as the beasts do, and never revive more. But upon the supposed *uncertainty* of the event, 'tis perfect *madness*, since wisdom directs us to take the *safest* course ; and that is the safest course which provides for the *worst*. How then must the case stand, when it is not so much as uncertain, as the *sceptical* sinner would have it, whether there be another state besides this ; but clear and evident as a truth of this nature can be. Yes, 'tis *certain*, 'tis past doubt with all who have impartially weighed the proofs of a future state, with which reason and revelation supply us. Hardly any truth can show brighter evidences than this : not the existence of God, as an infinitely wise and holy being ; not his *moral* providence and govern-

government over the world : for if there be a God *who made us* ; there is a God who will judge us, having made us reasonable, free, accountable creatures. If there be a *providence* which directs the affairs of the *present* world, there must be a *world to come*, when the *dark* parts of this *providence* shall be cleared up, and all *difficulties* about it answered ; which upon supposition of no other world besides this, would not be *mere* difficulties, but *unsurmountable* objections. Is God our maker and governour, and will he not call us to account how we have managed ? I can hardly think that any one, who disbelieves a future state of rewards and punishments, can firmly believe the existence of an infinitely wise, and just, and good being, the creator, preserver, and governour of the world. Whoever is inclined to deny one of these, is at the same time tempted to cast off the belief of both. Besides which it ought to be considered, what abundant evidence we have of the truth of the gospel ; that a truth of this nature is not capable of more satisfactory proof than that which the gospel brings with it. Now 'tis not more certain that the gospel is true, than it is that there is a future state of recompences. *Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel* : this doctrine is asserted or supposed

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in every page of the new testament. There is no need now that one should arise from the dead, since our Saviour himself rose, and has given us assurance that there shall be a *resurrection both of the just, and the unjust.* So that he who will not believe Christ and his apostles, neither would he repent, *tho' one rose from the dead.* That this then is not man's only life, nor his final state, is undeniable. (" But do I *consider* it as I ought? " have I by faith and meditation drawn " aside the curtain, and looked into that " invisible world? have I thought seriously " about it? the rewards and punishments " of it, or the different treatment and abodes of good and bad men there? have " I considered how momentous these *future* things are in comparison of things " *present*, these *unseen* things in comparison " of things *seen*, these *eternal* things in " comparison of things *temporal*? Perhaps " I do not positively disbelieve or reject " them; but then seldom or never thinking about them, I do not properly and " explicitly believe them.")

THESE then are some of those things, which persons engaged in a course of sin *do not consider.* They are matters of the highest importance, and would be so acknowledged

^a John v. 28. Acts xvii. 31, 24, 15.

knowledge by them, did they consider. But this they do not, and the effect is just such as might be expected. Which brings me,

2. To set before you the *deplorable consequences* of this *neglect* of *serious consideration*. These I shall represent in the next discourse.



School-room Sabbath August 20. 1837.



SERMON XII.

Fatal Effects of Inconsideration.

ISAIAH i. 3.

—*My people doth not consider.*

THE charge here brought against the ancient Jews, I proposed to treat in a double view.

I. As it more especially concerns *impenitent* sinners. And,

II. As in a *lesser* degree it too frequently affects persons of *sincere* piety.

IN treating it as more especially the character of *impenitent* sinners, I have

I. AMONG a great many things of the highest importance, instanced some *particulars*, which 'tis manifest all who continue in a state of *unrepented* sin, *do not consider*. As the instructions of reason and scripture, in relation to God, his providence, his attributes,

butes, and his works ; the great end for which they were made, and what is their true interest and highest happiness ; the infinite obligations they are under to God, whose commands they disobey ; the great importance of salvation, and what the indispensable terms are on which the gospel offers it ; the nature and tendency of their present course of life ; the uncertainty of the life they waste ; and the certainty of a life to come, and a future righteous judgment which all must undergo : these are some particulars of the greatest importance, which *impenitent* sinners neglect to *consider*. To prevent any of my hearers from continuing longer in this stupid and fatal negligence, I shall now

2. SET before you the *deplorable consequences* of this *neglect* of *serious consideration*.
And,

1. MEN do *not consider*, and therefore do *not know*. This consequence is plainly intimated in the connection of the words with the immediately preceeding. *Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider*. They do *not know*, because they *do not consider*. Many times this refusal to consider, is the occasion of very gross ignorance in the things of God. People are as ignorant of these things, as if they had no means of coming acquainted with them. The reason of which

is,

is, that tho' they have means in plenty, they make no use of them; the means of knowledge being to no purpose where they are not applied by *consideration*. We must *consider* what the things are which God has made known to us, whether by our own reason, or in the sacred scripture; otherwise, all that God has done is only like opening a book before a blind man, or speaking words to one who is deaf; with this difference, that our blindness and deafness being voluntary, and in reality nothing else but our inconsideration, we are without excuse, and our case consequently without pity. This is the effect of a *total* want of *consideration*; the ignorance proceeding hence is likewise total, or next to it. And where there is some degree of *consideration*, but the thoughts are not applied with that *closeness* and *sincerity*, which the nature and importance of the subject demanded: tho' men may not appear so shamefully ignorant, nay, may have the reputation of persons of considerable knowledge; yet they are really deficient in that knowledge of God and of themselves, of their duty and their interest, which a serious and thorough *consideration* of things would have given them. Now who, except the persons labouring under this ignorance, but must be sensible of its
unhappy

unhappy and too frequently fatal effects? The degree of this ignorance usually follows that of mens neglect to *consider*; and ignorance, according to the greater or lesser degree of it, does more or less blind the mind, deprive all the motives of the gospel of their natural efficacy, and make it impossible, in a moral way, for men to be wrought upon by all the methods the gospel makes use of for this end. And this minds me of another bad effect of inconsideration.

2. MEN do *not consider*, and therefore are without *all awakening* apprehensions of the *guilt* and *misery* of a vicious course of life. Consideration is previous to a work of conviction, as a work of conviction is antecedent to the conversion of a sinner from his wicked ways. How can it be expected that they whom a custom in sin hath render'd secure and stupid, should be rouzed out of their lethargy; unless they are first brought to weigh and consider things? By what arts, what methods, shall we come at the consciences of such persons? by what springs shall we work upon their fears? There is, in this respect, a wide difference betwixt *spiritual* objects, and the objects of *sense*. Sensible objects often strike us unexpectedly, and raise our passions before we are aware of it; upon the first sight, or the first hearing, we turn pale and tremble; we are

afraid

afraid whether we will or no, we cannot command the emotions of our own souls; and many times we are surprized into an immoderate fear by that which upon examination we find deserved rather to have been slighted. But 'tis not thus here; the object being remote from sense, must be present to the mind, either by an act of its own, or of some one else, who places it in full view before us. And, indeed, where this last is done, as it is sometimes in a sermon, the subject and manner of which are alike fitted to alarm the hearer; when he perceives himself so nearly concerned in what is delivered; the effect, for the present, is like that of a serious consideration: but if this be not added thoroughly to rouse the mind, and make the conviction enter deep, the impression is exceeding transient, and he who appeared so much moved in hearing, is not at all changed afterwards; being like a drowsy person, who, as soon as the cause which imperfectly awakened him is removed, or very soon after, drops asleep again. To convince the sinner of the evil of his ways, of the guilt he has contracted by his transgressions of the Divine laws, and of the danger he incurs by his guilt; to convince him effectually and lastingly of this, he had need first be persuaded to sit down and dwell upon the thought of those things, which show
the

the dreadful nature and consequences of wilful habitual sin. That the sinner may tremble for fear of God's judgments, and by his fear be urged to flee from them; 'tis not enough that the minister sets these things before him, but he himself must be assistant, and keep his mind for some time after attentive to these tremendous objects. For want of this he is fearless, he mocks at danger, he makes a jest of reproofs and admonitions, and *laughs* at those who *pity* him; he apprehends not what occasion there is for so much outcry.

3. PERSONS engaged in a vicious course *do not consider*, and are therefore *little solicitous to make their peace with God*, and to *secure an interest in the Saviour*, and the *salvation* proposed to them in the gospel. They are not in haste to do those things, as long as they see not the necessity of them, the great urgency of the affair, and the manifold and unspeakably great advantages which would arise from hence. To be at peace with God! to have this almighty Being our friend, whose favour is as desirable as his displeasure is dreadful! what condition can recommend itself more to one who thinks of it? 'Tis a condition in which heaven is begun; there's a sacred rest and security of mind attends it; and not only rest, but satisfaction and pleasure. A man has then a true enjoyment of himself,

himself, and of other things, and not till then. Being reconciled to God, conscience is reconciled to him; and conscience being reconciled furnishes a continual feast, and speaks to him in a voice which exceeds the sweetest musick. But then 'tis only to him who thinks and reflects, that the happiness of such a condition is so apparent, as to engage his warmest and best settled resolutions to be himself thus happy, if it may be; as nothing can hinder it, once a man sets heartily about it. "O my soul, I need
" a Saviour; and the mercy of God has
" provided one, one *able to save to the utter-*
" *most*; and thro' him offers life and eter-
" nal salvation to me: and shall this Sa-
" viour be provided, and this salvation of-
" fered *in vain*? in vain it must be, if I will
" *not consider*. 'Till then I shall not apply
" to the Redeemer, shall not trouble my-
" self about the *blood of sprinkling*, for the
" pardon of my sins; or the *Spirit of grace,*
" *and holiness, and consolation* for the con-
" quest of sin in my soul, and settling it in
" a state of holy peace and tranquillity.
" ^p *The whole need not a physician*, but the
" sick; nor will the sick go to him, how
" much soever they want it, if they do not
" know themselves to be sick, or conceive

^p Matt. ix. 12.

“ the disorder they are under to be no way “ dangerous.” And tho’ the gospel salvation be such, as no one can help preferring to all the most tempting objects by which he is solicited to renounce his part in it, on condition he attends to it, and meditates about it as he ought to do ; yet in case this is not done, the scene is opened in vain, the prospect will not attract our desires, and raise our hopes. The soul will remain dead and insensible to the glories of that upper world, as if they were all imaginary. Hope there may be of being happy after death, where there is *little* consideration, and because there is but little ; but not that hope which awakens, which fires, which invigorates all the powers of our nature, and engages us to set them all on work in pursuit of the promised and expected blessedness.

4. THEY do *not* consider, and therefore resign themselves to the *conduct* of *appetite*, and *lust*, and *passion*. They suffer these blind guides to lead them, because the man is as blind as his passions ; for none so blind as they who *will not* see. This is their case, they have eyes, and will not open them ; they had rather follow their lusts blindfold unto destruction. Strange and unaccountable choice ! which they could never make, did they duly consider the unparallel’d folly of it. ’Tis easy going down hill ; there is a
pleasure

pleasure in gratifying strong inclinations, and besides this, it has the *appearance* of *liberty* too; and all these together, *ease*, *pleasure*, and *liberty*, hold them fast like a three-fold cord, which cannot be broken without great labour and pain. But is *ease* to be preferred to *safety*? Whatever charms there may be in a bed of down; yet were a man's house on fire, and the soft couch which invited to sleep, like to be turned into a bed of flames, the most slothful person would not debate about the prudence of relinquishing it. There may be *pleasure* in the cup; but if there be *poison* too, no one who values his life will touch it. As to the boasted *liberty* of a life led according to fancy and inclination, 'tis something *not real*, wholly founded in a mistake. Men enslaved to their vices, are the truest slaves, tho' they will not own it, and it may be are not sensible of it. They are led in chains, only these chains, some how or other, are not seen and felt. So the dog tied to a cart, if he follows willingly, may not perceive he is tied; but let him stand still, or attempt to go a contrary way, and he will quickly find the cord straiten, and pull him the way he would not go. Thus the sinner is a voluntary slave, but never the less a slave for that; only he is not sensible of his slavery, which makes it but so much the more deplorable - - - *laxo fune*

laborat. The rope hangs *loose*, because he makes no resistance to his lusts which lead him. As soon as he does this, and opposes his inclinations, he is immediately convinced how great a slave he has been. The violence of a stream is no other way so well known as by swimming against it. Once we are resolved to break off from our old habits, our experience makes us sensible that fetters of iron are not such instruments of servitude as these. The *shame* too of following our vicious passions and inclinations, when we have reason given us to guide and controul them, would work upon us, if we used ourselves to serious reflection. I say, if we were used to reflect upon the shamefulness of such a conduct, it would do it: for this must be supposed, or else men may be guilty of the most shameful things, and yet not be ashamed of them; as the prophet observes of the people of the Jews: *Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush.* Nay, they may come to that pass as to *glory in their shame*; like those of whom the apostle makes mention. The reason is, they do not consider things, and so are not apprehensive of that deformity, that baseness, that folly in them, which seen by them in a clear and full light, would
over-

overwhelm them with confusion. And thus these great principles of fear, and hope, and shame, which God has wisely and kindly planted in our nature, in order to keep us from the ways of sin; or, if unwarily got into them, to reclaim us again, and restore us to the right path; prove insignificant thro' the neglect of serious consideration.

5. MEN do *not consider*, and for that reason it is the *temptations* to sin are so *invincible*. These temptations are taken from the world, which is perpetually solliciting our senses, and exciting our desires. The good and the evil things of the world, riches and poverty, pleasure and pain, honour and disgrace, its friendship and its enmity, its smiles and its frowns, have a great deal of temptation in them to the generality of mankind, whom they keep from hearkning to the calls and invitations of the gospel, and devoting themselves to the duties of religion. But then it is only to the *inconsiderate* that they are thus *irresistibly* tempting: to those who do *not consider* what the world is, or what they themselves are; how *narrow* the world, how *large* and *boundless* their desires; how *vain* and *worthless* the world, how *great* and *excellent* the capacities with which God has endowed them; how *transient* the world, and all things in it, while their souls are *immortal*. They do not compare earth

with heaven, time with eternity ; they could not then prefer shadows to realities, trifles to things of infinite and everlasting importance, nor find it so difficult to resist and overcome all the allurements they can meet with in the ways of sin, or opposition in the way of their duty. Did they frequently and seriously ballance things one against another, so as to have an habitual sense of the infinite disproportion between them : with what ease would they be able to baffle a temptation to *mind* earthly things, and *neglect* heavenly ; to be *thoughtful* about the events of time, and *thoughtless* about eternity ; to *chuse* their portion in this life, and *give up* all their title to another ! Whatever the world could offer to part betwixt *Christ* and them, to induce them to violate a good conscience, to hazard the loss of the divine favour, and quit their design of being happy for ever, would be rejected with the utmost scorn. They would resolve upon a life of strict holiness and obedience, and abide fixed in that resolution, in spite of all that the world, under the management of Satan, could do to draw them aside from God and their duty. “ I am tempted with
“ the prospect of a little gain ; but do I
“ *consider* how dear I must pay for it ?
“ what a dreadful risque I run by every
“ sinful gratification, and much more by
“ continued

“ continued impenitency ? that for superficial and vanishing delights, I sacrifice the repose of my mind, and the manly, or rather divine satisfactions of virtue and religion ? ” Were these and such like things *considered* as they ought, the temptations to sin would be disarmed of all their power ; whereas now, for want of their being attended to, sin ensnares and deludes men to their everlasting ruin. They are persuaded by arguments which they could answer, and led captive in bands which they could break with the greatest ease, did they by *consideration* awaken their drowsy powers.

6. MEN will *not consider*, and therefore support themselves with *false and dangerous props* ; such as these, that God is merciful, that Christ died for sinners, and that it will be time enough to repent hereafter.

1. GOD is merciful, and therefore will not condemn his creatures to everlasting punishment. What ! not tho’ they are finally impenitent ? not tho’ they despise his mercy, and will not be persuaded even by that, or by the terrors of the Lord, to perform their indispensable duty ? not tho’ he has expressly threatned he will *destroy the ungodly* ? They who can flatter themselves with such foolish hopes as these, show themselves never to have considered what the name of God, as declared

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; 2 Pet. iii. 7. 2 Thess. i. 8, 9.

declared in scripture, imports: they show themselves to have a very imperfect notion of the great God; a notion very unworthy of him who is the first and most excellent of all beings, the fountain of perfection, and the wise and righteous governour of the world. Mercy is not the *only* perfection of the divine nature, it is but one of many; from which if it were found separated, it would not be a perfection. Mercy without wisdom to *guide*, and holiness and justice to *limit* it, would be a sort of blind and undistinguishing affection. Tho' God be infinitely merciful, yet every one is not a *proper* object of mercy; and it belongs to wisdom and holiness to determine who are, and who are not fit objects of it. At the same time that, for the encouragement of the *penitent*, God proclaims his name the ^t *Lord God, merciful and gracious*; he adds, by way of *terror* to the *impenitent*, that he will *by no means clear the guilty*. God is not only merciful in his own nature, but the creator of mankind; and may we not expect to find mercy from a kind and merciful creator? The rebellious *Jews* seemed to have laid a great stress upon this; but are told by the prophet, that ^u *because they were a people who had no understanding*, i. e. behaved as if they had none, *he that made them would not have*

^t Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. ^u Isai. xxvii. 11.

have mercy on them, and he that form'd them would show them no favour. Is it to no purpose, think you, that God has threatened his enemies *with everlasting destruction from his presence?* Are the terrors of the Almighty vain terrors? the thunders of his word only designed to frighten us? will his lightnings never strike? Depend on it, if God *threatens*, he will *execute*; if he tells us, that *without* ^w *holiness, no man shall see his face*, he will never depart from his word.

2. ^{*} *Christ died for sinners, and whosoever believeth in him shall not perish.* Now we believe in *Christ* as well as others, and rely upon him for salvation: we are willing to give him the *glory* of the *whole* work. --- But, O remember, 'tis not every kind of *faith* which is saving; nor will *Christ* esteem it for his *glory*, to own persons of a *vicious* character for his, and to save them *in* their sins. ^y *The devils believe and tremble.* The same scriptures which speak of justification by faith, have likewise defin'd that faith; and that by such plain marks, that we cannot, unless wilfully, mistake it. The faith which will be *counted to us for righteousness*, must have real inherent righteousness ^z accompanying it;

^w Heb. xii. 14.

^{*} Rom. v. 6. John iii. 15.

^y James ii. 19.

^z Rom. vi. 1. Mark i. 15.

James ii. 17.

it; it must be joined with repentance, and followed with good works. These are the inseparable fruits of an evangelical faith. O think not the *holy* Jesus to be such a friend to *sin*, as to lay down his life for this end, that men might *sin on unpunished*! he died ^a to save us from our sins, not in them; from their reigning, as well as their damning power; from their pollution, as well as from their guilt; to *sanctify*, as well as to *justify* us. The death of *Christ*, when considered as it should be, is far from affording the least shelter to impenitency; for why did *Christ* die, but because the holiness of the divine nature, and the honour of the divine law, render'd it unfit for God to pardon sin without a sacrifice of atonement? And if the forgiveness of sin, without such a sacrifice, would not have been so much for the honour of God's perfections and government; how much less would the pardon of it be, *without repentance*? Sin has not chang'd its nature by *Christ's* dying for sinners; 'tis still the same evil and hateful thing as ever; yea, *more hateful*, as we have now more powerful motives, and in greater numbers, to forsake it: and unless we do forsake it, we shall not answer the ^b design of our Saviour, in dying for us; and not answering the de-

^a Mat. i. 21. Rom. vi. 10.

^b Tit. ii. 14.

design of his death, we can have no good ground to expect any benefit by it.

3. REPENTANCE may be necessary, but it will be *time enough* to repent *hereafter*. And who, I beseech you, told us so? sure I am, that God never did: on the contrary, in the proclamation of mercy, he saith, *“To day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”* *To day* is in some sense *ours*, for we may lay hold of the present time; *to-morrow* is *not*. Futurity is in the sole disposal and command of God, and known to him only; which is a very good reason, why we should make the best use we can of the present time. This persuasion then cometh not from him who calleth us, but from another hand. 'Tis plain our lusts, that is, our very worst enemies, are our advisers: we are *hardned thro' the deceitfulness of sin*. But are these our enemies no better known? Whatever our sinful passions, which are not willing to be given up, may suggest, we have no time to lose, can gain nothing by delays, but may lose more than can be conceived. Of all those delusive hopes, with which sinners please themselves, this of repenting *hereafter*, is, perhaps, the most fatal, and the most common. Why do I talk of repenting hereafter, but because I do not love to think of repenting presently? and will not the same

same reason be likely to keep me from ever repenting? because I can never repent, but the time when I do repent must then be present, and upon that account will be thought as improper as the instant *now*. Let us be persuaded to consider, that delays in this case are infinitely dangerous. We may not live to that *hereafter*, of which we fondly dream; some fatal accident, or mortal distemper, may come in betwixt us, and that *hereafter*, and at once cut off all our thoughts and purposes for this world and the next. As to this world, the consequence of being taken away in the midst of designs, which we delay'd to execute, comparatively speaking, is not great; but as to the next, 'tis most dreadful. Or supposing we should protract our days to the utmost length, if we go on sinning all that time, we shall only grow more hardned, and at the same time, that we have *more need* of the Spirit of God to excite and assist us, have the *less reason* to expect his operations. Can any thing then be a more evident sign of the most wretched *inconsideration*, than indulging to such delays? Would any but a careless inconsiderate prodigal waste his time, and run the most imminent danger in a matter, which, if he pleased, he might put out of all hazard? This we might do, as to our everlasting salvation, by immediately applying ourselves to
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whatever our hand findeth to do : and consequently, if we do not, but are resolved to put it to the venture, we must give wiser persons leave to think that we act like those who are void of all understanding. Nor will it extenuate our folly to plead, that at worst we shall have the *opportunity* of a death-bed repentance ; say rather the *chance* ; for we may die suddenly, or of a distemper, which will not allow the exercise of reason ; or may flatter ourselves with thoughts of longer life, when we are very near our last hour : or having too long persisted in a course of presumptuous sin, may have our conscience stupified, or be awaken'd with despair ; and, at best, cannot be sure, that such a forc'd business deserves the name of evangelical repentance, and will be accepted as such. Upon all which accounts, none will *delay* in a matter of such importance, but they who *do not consider*.

LET me now *apply* what has been offer'd.

I. How *inexcusable* must all those appear who *perish* in their *sins* ! They perish because they *will not consider* ; and must not then their destruction be of themselves ? They are instructed in their duty towards God, towards their neighbour, and towards themselves ; what they must do, and what they are to avoid ; their duty is set before them
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in a variety of lights, that in one or other they might discern the reasonableness of it, and be allur'd to perform it ; but they *will not consider*. They have their interest clearly represented to them, are shown wherein it consists, and how incompatible the continuance in any known sin is with it ; but they *will not consider*. ^d *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven, in the scripture, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness ; and they are frequently warned, and earnestly intreated, to flee from the wrath to come ; are put in mind of the danger they incur by delays, and reasoned with concerning a judgment to come, as well as concerning righteousness and temperance : and one would imagine things of this nature should awaken men, and the thoughts of them be too strong for any temptations which could offer to induce them to neglect these ; but, alas ! they will not consider*. They are applied to by the most engaging motives of the gospel, by the tender mercies of God, by the love of a Saviour, his dying love, by those exceeding great and precious promises, in comparison with which, all the offers of the world may well appear contemptible. Sometimes we address to their hopes, sometimes to their fears, sometimes to self-love, sometimes to gratitude ; we endeavour

^d Rom. i. 18.

deavour to *draw* them, and if that will not do, to *drive* them as it were, to repentance and amendment of life; but all in *vain*, because *they will not consider*. And whose fault but their *own* is it that they *will not consider*? must they not hereby be left without excuse? what *more* would they have the wise and merciful God do for them? *All things are ready* on God's part, if they can be persuaded to return to him, he is *ready* to receive them. He has, on his part, done all that can be expected from his goodness, all that is consistent with his wisdom. The matter *sticks* with *you*, Sirs; 'tis expected, and justly, that you should *consider* the offers which are made you, and not wait till you are *compelled* to do it. It must be a *free* act, otherwise what is there that you do *yourselves*? and to think of gaining heaven, without taking any pains for it, is a vain thought indeed, and can be owing to nothing else but the *want* of *serious* consideration.

2. HERE you see, in case you have any *purposes* of leading a *holy* life, *where* you must *begin*, what is the *first* thing you have to do, and preparatory to all the rest. You must *sit down* and *consider*. * *I thought on my ways*, says the *Psalmist*, and *turned my feet unto thy testimonies*. *Think*, and the work is *soon* done; but without thinking will *never* be done.

'Tis

'Tis by means of consideration that we come to know what we have to do, and the order of doing it; what is to be done first, and what last, and the steps we are to proceed by in our progress towards conversion, and from thence towards the higher degrees of christian perfection. We have a clearer notion of things, our way lies plain before us, and we are in little or no danger of going astray from it through ignorance and mistake. And then as consideration discovers what we have to do, and the method in which we are to proceed, so it quickens and persuades us to set about it. There's a natural tendency in serious consideration, to awaken the drowsy languid powers of the mind, to bring over the passions to the right side, and to make them vigorous in the defence of it; to fix the wavering resolutions of the soul, and to revive its fainting courage. 'Tis necessary then you should *begin* here: and that you may not, by a *superficial* performance of this first part of your work, defeat your hopes of success in the farther progress of it, you are to take care that your notion of consideration itself be not wrong. A *few slight and transient* thoughts of things relating to our everlasting peace, do not deserve to be called by this name. No, to *consider*, is to come up *close* to an object; to view it with all the *care* and *exactness* we can; if possible,

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to suffer nothing to escape us, which is of any weight and importance, and *frequently* to revolve the things in our minds, because what the first stroke did not do, repeated strokes may; the impression hereby made, may be at length so deep, as not to be easily effac'd; while a single thought or two, however serious and vivid, can signify but little. Let me therefore,

3. *Exhort* you to practise a duty so necessary, and of such infinite advantage; and be so happy, as to prevail upou you.---

But this exhortation, with the consideration of this charge, of *not considering*, as affecting even persons in the *main good*, I shall reserve for another discourse.





S E R M O N XIII.

III Effects of Inconsideration on good Men.

ISAIAH i. 3.

---- *My people doth not consider.*

IN treating these words, I have,

I. DISTINCTLY shown you several things of the greatest importance, which all, who continue in a state of *impenitence*, do not consider; viz. the instructions of *reason* and *scripture*, in relation to God, his *attributes*, his *providence*, and his *works*; the *great end* for which they were made, and what is their *true interest*, and highest *happiness*; the infinite *obligations* they are under to God, whose commands they disobey; the great *importance of salvation*, and the

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indispensible terms on which the gospel offers it; the *nature and tendency* of their present *course of life*; the *uncertainty* of the *life* they *waste*, and the *certainty* of a *life to come*, and a *future righteous judgment*, which all must undergo. And to prevent your continuing this fatal neglect of consideration, I

2. SET before you the *deplorable consequences* of this refusal or neglect to consider. It hinders men from *knowing* the things which belong to their eternal peace; it keeps them without any *awakening apprehensions* of the *guilt* and *misery* of their *vice*ous course; and, as a consequence, renders them *little solicitous* to make their *peace* with *God*, and secure an interest in the Saviour and the salvation propos'd in the gospel; it disposes men to *abandon themselves* to the conduct of *appetite*, and *lust*, and *passion*; it renders the *temptations to sin*, in a manner, *irresistible*; and inclines them to rest themselves on *false* and *dangerous props*; such as these, that *God is merciful*, and that *Christ died for sinners*, and therefore they need not repent, or, at worst, may safely trust to hereafter for repenting. I shall now, to prevent your suffering those infinitely mischievous effects of *inconsideration*,

3. *Exhort* you, who have hitherto neglected it; to practise a duty so necessary, and of such infinite advantage: and O that

I might be so happy as to prevail upon you!

Nothing would rejoice your friends more, who most sincerely wish your happiness; nothing be more acceptable to God; nothing give your own minds more comfort and satisfaction, both while discharging your duty, and in the review, than sober retired consideration. I could offer many things, which have a great deal of force in themselves, and ought therefore to have a great deal of efficacy with you. I shall briefly name some.

I. CONSIDERATION is the proper character of reasonable beings: the faculty is the main distinction of the man from the beast; and the exercise of it, of the wise man from the fool. Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors! remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me. So we may say, consider and shew yourselves men. There is nothing by which we show ourselves men, beings endowed with understanding and reason, more than by this. This proves our superiority over other creatures; that we are not confined by the impressions made upon our senses, tied down to the present object, but can apprehend things which

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fall not under the notice of sense, and turn our thought to this thing or that; that our minds can arrest themselves in their motions, and when it is of use, dwell upon an object without being obliged to pass from one object to the other, just as the scene happens to fleet before us. And are we not willing to maintain this distinction, and to act up to it? is it not the honour of our nature, that we are possessed of such a power as this? and will it not be our honour if we make a right use of it, and our everlasting reproach if we make a wrong use, or none at all?

2. WE show that we *can consider* in the things of *this life*; and why not then in the things of *religion*? That we *can*, is evident, because we *do*, even more than we should; I speak not of all, but of those who mind the world in earnest, and miss no opportunity of advancing their secular interest: how thoughtful, how over-charged with care, are such persons? and so it must always be where the affections are vehemently engaged. 'Tis true, even these persons are without *consideration* as to the things of the world, in the best sense of the word; they do not *consider* them in the manner they should, on the *right side*, and in a *true light*. Their *vanity* and *emptiness*, and their *short* and *fleeting* duration, is what they

never reflect upon: they do not *consider* for what *end* these things were given them by providence, and how they may be made to yield the greatest profit in the final issue. But however, in another sense, they cannot be charged with want of *consideration*, being full of contrivances relating to their earthly affairs, how to manage them, and make the best of every thing; that is, in their own phrase, they are sure to mind the *main chance*. Now I would only ask what there is in matters of a higher nature and concernment, those that regard your reconciliation with God, and your preparation for another world, that you should not be able *to consider* them, or have no heart to do it? It must be confess'd, these things lie a little more out of the way; the interests of the body, and of the present life, are not so directly and apparently concerned in them: but then, on the other side, to compensate for these disadvantages, they are of much greater importance, more suitable to the spiritual part of our nature, more worthy the exercise of our reasonable powers about them. Of this every man must be convinced by the first glance of his mind, and therefore will not be able to answer it to his own reason and conscience, if when he is troubled about these meaner things, and continually taking thought what he shall eat and drink,

drink, and wherewithal he shall be cloathed, and even about things less weighty than these; he will not employ any of his thoughts about his soul concerns, or of his time and pains in labouring for that bread which endureth to everlasting life.

3. Do your part, and ^e God will *not withhold his grace*, by which you shall be *inabled* to do *all* required of you. He will help the infirmities of your mind, give it a greater steadiness and constancy, direct it in the management of its thoughts, and help it to fix them on the most proper objects. Without this internal assistance it must be owned, there is such a difficulty in the exercise of serious consideration, to a person who has been wholly disused to it, and habituated to a careless and vicious course of life, abandoned to his passions, and who hardly ever did any thing but what his inclination led him to; that we might well despair of mens engaging in such a disagreeable work with any degree of heartiness, or going on in it with constancy: I say, *without divine assistance*, this might almost be despaired of; but where this is afforded, the case has quite another appearance. That the *Father of spirits*, who is ever present with his own offspring, who *knows* the *make* of the human mind, and in what way to influence any of

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its powers; that he is *able* to invigorate the soul, to raise it above the sphere of sensible objects, to guide and assist it in the regular use of its faculties, *cannot be doubted*: and there is as little room to question his *readiness* to do it, where his help is humbly implored, and faithfully improved. ^h *Consider what I say*, saith the apostle, *and the Lord give thee understanding in all things*. We are never sincere in our endeavours to discharge any duty incumbent upon us; but God is at hand to succour, and by his continual favourable aid, to crown our endeavours with desired success. To this add,

4. By *time and use* this exercise, however ungrateful at first, will become more *easy and pleasant*. The way will grow smoother, and the thoughts wear themselves a sort of track into which they will more naturally go, and move with more delight. There are few things to which we have not been accustomed, but we perform them awkwardly at first; but *custom*, as we are wont to say, is a *second nature*: and there is no reason to imagine but it will be so here, as well as in other cases, if we do not relax, and give off too soon: let us not therefore be discouraged with the opposition we meet, either from without or from within. Besides the encouragement mentioned just before, that

^h 2 Tim. ii. 7.

that *God is with us* ; 'tis a farther inducement to proceed, that the pain and trouble of our work will lessen upon our hands : we shall be able to recollect our thoughts without so much ado, and when we have recollected them, to employ them usefully and holily ; and this by degrees with increasing pleasure. It will be a pleasure to us to think that we are so well employed ; at once approved by God and our own minds, and to find that the work is like to have so happy an issue. The things too which are the objects of our *consideration*, being many of them of the most excellent kind, cannot but afford us pleasure in conversing with them, after we are more familiarly acquainted.

5. *CONSIDERATION* is farther recommended by its most *blessed effects*. As, to mention only two of a more general nature ; the first, our being *converted* from the error of our ways ; the other, our *constant perseverance* in the practice of holiness.---*Consider*, and the consequence will be your *breaking off* from your sins by *repentance*. You will see the errors of your ways, and be *converted* from them. You will no longer be able to allow yourselves in acting the foolish and mad part you have done. Your judgment of things and regard to them will be quite altered. Sin will appear the most
hateful,

hateful, as well as the most dangerous thing in the world; you will wonder what could reconcile you to it, much more what could make you in love with it: the enchantment you were under will vanish; and you that had so fond a conceit of yourselves, as the only free and happy men, will find that you were *poor*, and *blind*, and *naked*, and *miserable*. And tho' this discovery may be attended with some uneasiness; yet it will be a reasonable ground of rejoicing in this respect, that by shewing you the wretchedness of your condition, it makes you resolved to change it. And how happy will you think yourselves when you shall have obtained your liberty, be freed from that deplorable servitude to sin in which you had been held so long, and brought out of prison into the open light, and able to exert your powers according to their original intention! *The cripple, who was laid at the gate of the temple to ask alms of those who came thither to worship, and being restored to perfect strength and soundness by the apostles Peter and John, entred with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God; hardly able to contain himself, or express his joy; will be but an imperfect emblem of you, when you perceive the fetters of sin knocked off, and the powers of your souls, which vicious habits had lamed* and

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and disabled, endowed with a new strength. Such a change as this will be esteemed the most joyful event which could possibly have happened to you; 'twill be like a resurrection from the dead to a higher and better life than you were ever before acquainted with.---For this is the *other effect* of serious and renewed consideration, that you will *persevere* with constancy in the practice of holiness; will not only *put off the old man with his affections and lusts*, but *put on the new* with all his divine qualities; will not only leave the way of destruction, but be continually advancing in the way of life. And when matters are brought to this happy period, you will say that you *live indeed*, and never lived till now. To conclude,

6. WERE there nothing else but this one motive to engage you to *consider*, this one should be *irresistible*, that it is *absolutely necessary*: it cannot be dispensed with; the consequence of neglecting it is fatal, and never to be retrieved, as I showed you before. Now there is no answer to an argument taken from *necessity*, no objection can weigh against it. Is *consideration* difficult? is it disagreeable? add, but it is *necessary*: I cannot be saved without it; for to be saved from the future punishment of sin, I must first be delivered from the power of it; and before

before I shall be set free from this, I must maturely, and again and again weigh and *consider* things, that my resolutions may be strong enough to break thro' all the opposition I shall meet. Often repeat this to yourself, "O my soul, there is a necessity for "*consideration* ; thou hast no other choice "*before thee, but to consider or be undone ;* "*to suffer thyself to be carried away by* "*thy own passions, by the enticements and* "*examples of sinners, and by the temp-* "*tations of the world into the pit of de-* "*struction ; or to make a resolute stand,* "*open thine eyes and look about thee, and* "*examine and compare things together ;* "*till first thy judgment is fully enlightned,* "*then thy will more thoroughly determin-* "*ed, and at length thy affections them-* "*selves listed in the cause of virtue and re-* "*ligion. Consider this, O my soul ; beg of* "*God to incline thine heart to this neces-* "*sary work, and to assist thee in it ; and* "*rest not, till by perseverance in this course,* "*thou art made wise to salvation."*

II. LET us now suppose this charge to be brought against *persons of sincere piety*, whom it too frequently affects in a *lesser degree*. They cannot indeed be justly accused of refusing to *consider*, in the same sense as they may whose *sin remaineth on them*.

They

¹ *They have thought on their ways, and turned their feet to the way of God's commandments: they have seriously considered the things of their souls; and, as the effect of that consideration, are convinced of the necessity of holiness; so convinced, that they have not ceased using all the means proper, till they are become holy in a prevailing degree; so as to have a title to the favour of God, and the blessedness of heaven, according to the terms of the gospel-covenant. But still they are too often very deficient in the duty of consideration, and thro' their deficiency here, come behind in many other respects. All that consideration which is necessary to the essence of virtue and piety, they practise; but not always that which is requisite to a state of greater perfection. There are several things which too plainly prove their want of consideration:*

I. *THE errors and failings of which they are too often guilty. I do not mean those which are so incident to the human nature in the present state, that 'tis next to impossible to preserve ourselves entirely free from them; but those which, with due care and circumspection, we might easily enough avoid. Christians, whose sincerity, in the main, can hardly be questioned, shall yet sometimes take those liberties which are not to be justified; do things*

things under the influence of their passions, which they are far from being satisfied in after they are done, when they come to reflect coolly upon them. And to what are these faulty indulgencies owing, those parts of their conversation which are so unsuitable to and unworthy of the rest? There is no other so likely cause of this, as their not accustoming themselves so much as they should to serious and retired *consideration*: for did they *consider*, as they ought, how dear every such indulgence of their passions and inclinations will cost them, how much they suffer by every doubtful action, every such action as they cannot heartily approve; the peace, and pleasure, and satisfaction, they sacrifice for a transient gratification of sense and fancy; it is not to be supposed but they would act a wiser part: their behaviour would be more regular and uniform; they would not be sometimes victorious over temptation, and at other times vanquish'd by it; but be more constantly prepared to resist and overcome the enemies of their salvation. *Consideration* is not a work once for all, at the entrance upon a religious life only, or to which we are to return after long intervals; no, but an exercise that we are frequently to repeat: and doubtless, if we did so, revolving in our thoughts the *evil* of sin in all the kinds, and degrees, and appearances of
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of it, and the equal *folly* of it upon the account of the sad consequences it draws after it in this life, where it does not damn men in the next; we should not make so bold with temptations to sin; we should be more afraid of the least compliance with our inclinations, or the examples of the world in what was wrong; and not venture a step out of the way of our duty, having beforehand weighed the danger of so doing: lest from gratifying our irregular passions in some lesser instances and degrees, we should be drawn to do it in greater; and thus experience the anxiety and disturbance of mind which the pleasure of a *moment* may occasion for a *long* time after.

2. *S L O T H* and *inactivity* in a virtuous and religious course of life, is another argument of a defect of *consideration*, even in good men. Perhaps they are not chargeable with such wanderings from the path of strict duty, such vain excursions as some are; they do not visibly and directly turn out of the right way; but where is the progress they should make in it? If we can't say they do *evil*, can we say they do *all* the *good* they might? do they abound in the fruits of holiness? are they *zealously affected* in that which is *good*? always well employed, allowance being made for what is necessary to unbend and refresh our feeble natures? Alas, the instances of the contrary are too frequent, of christians
 who,

who, at times, seem hardly to be in earnest, to have little or no notion of the excellence of virtue in every ascending degree of it, and the transcendent glory of the future reward, not to care whether they attain or fall short of it, so sluggish and indolent are they, so little careful to redeem their time, and make a right improvement of all their talents! And whence does this arise, but from their neglect to *retire* at proper seasons, and enter into close and serious *consideration* of the things of religion as they ought to do? Did they use themselves to the more frequent *consideration* of these things, which I mentioned at the entrance upon this subject, (such as the being, and providence, and attributes of God; the end for which they were made, and what is their true interest and happiness; the infinite obligations they are under to God, the uncertainty of life, and the certainty of a world to come, and the like) as by the *consideration* of these momentous subjects, they have been persuaded to lead a holy and good life; would not a more frequent and longer continued meditation of them than it may be they allow themselves, excite them to live still better, to be more diligent in working out their salvation, and more active and unwearied in the course of the christian life? We have no reason to imagine but this would be the effect. Akin to this is,

3. THAT

3. THAT *indivotion* in the *exercifes* of religious *worship*, which christians are too apt to slide into, and which too visibly argues their disuse of that *consideration*, which would be of admirable service to fan the sacred fire, when it began to grow dull and languid ; ^m *While I was musing*, saith the Psalmist, *the fire burned*. Thus while we are meditating on some of these numberless objects, with which religion supplies us (as particularly the divine perfections and benefits ; the reasons we have to love God, both for what he *is* in *himself*, and *has done* for us ; the privilege of drawing nigh to God in the duties of divine worship, and the many advantages accruing from it ; the sweet composure, and tranquillity, and perpetual pleasing entertainment of a devout temper ; while we are meditating upon these and such like subjects) our souls are awakened into a new vigour, feel their best passions excited in them, and have more fervent desires after God, and a more sensible delight in him, than at other times. This shows the necessity of intermixing *consideration* in our retirements as we see occasion, in order to keep up the life and spirit of devotion. 'Tis *consideration* which must present these objects to the mind, about which devotion is employ'd ; set them in an agreeable light,

^m Psal. xxxix. 3.

and give them a power to impress the heart : and consequently it must ordinarily be from want of consideration, or so much of it as is necessary, that the soul of the true christian is so little raised and affected in the exercises of religion, and by the most engaging objects of a spiritual kind.

4. THE love of the world, which has too much the ascendant over some pious minds, and their being so greatly moved, if not unbinged, by the shocks and changes of it, must often be ascribed to the same cause. The consideration of the vanity and transitoriness of all worldly things; that the whole is little more than an empty fashion or appearance, which quickly passes away; that in a few days more the world will be the same to us, as to those who departed out of it ages ago, nay, as to those who were never yet born into it, in respect of enjoyment; and upon all other accounts, but the good or evil actions we have done, or the good or evil habits we have contracted in the body, which will mightily influence our state of separation from it; the consideration of these, and such like things, would help to give us the victory over the world, cure our minds of their earthliness, make us superior to its vain amusements and delights, and less sensible of its crosses and disappointments. When therefore we see
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men who do not perfectly idolize the world, and esteem it their chief good and highest portion, yet attribute abundantly too much to it; bowed down with its cares, and so fond of worldly riches, as to covet them eagerly, pursue them immoderately, and when they have got them, unwilling to apply them to their proper use, of rendering their own lives, and those of others, more easy and comfortable: when we see men lifted up and cast down for very slight causes, dejected in adversity, and ready to sink under every burden and affliction; must we not say, that tho' not utter strangers to *consideration*, they are not so intimately acquainted with it as they should be? particularly with those considerations which relate to the worthlessness of earthly enjoyments in an abstracted view, or separate from the good use which is made of them, and the lightness and momentariness of its afflictions? 'Tis true, upon some uncommon occasions, the passions may rise higher than usual, where they are ordinarily kept under good government; and a man be affected with some particular occurrence or disappointment more than *reason* or *religion* will allow; this, I say, may be the case, *sometimes*, with those whose minds, by the manly work of *reflection* and *consideration*, are generally well established:

blished: but then tho' reasoning and debating matters does not presently lay the storm, quiet their tumults, cure their sad and despairing, and ease their anxious thoughts; tho' it does not affect all this immediately and sensibly, it is not without all effect, it prevents a bad matter from growing worse, entitles a man to divine assistance, and with that heavenly succour does, tho' by slow degrees, bring back the mind to its right state. The considerate thinking christian may be shaken for a while, and, as it were, mov'd from the firm basis he stands upon; but in time recovers his steadfastness again, and triumphs over his own passions, and the temptations of the world.

5. A *misplaced* and *misconducted* zeal; a zeal for opinions and practices we *know not why*, and this zeal under so little government, as to occasion *bitter* strife and animosity among christians, and raise those disturbances in the church of God, as hinder its flourishing state; this likewise shews, that men do not *consider*. They *don't consider* the *commonness* of the thing for men to have a zeal for God without knowledge, and the mischievous consequences of it both to themselves and others, to their own interest and that of religion. They would then proceed more *warily* and *coolly*, *examine well* before they espoused any side so *thoroughly*

roughly and warmly, and never suffer their zeal to hurry them beyond the bounds of *prudence* and *charity*. Once more,

6. 'Tis many times because they do *not consider*, that they who are religious do not *enjoy* their religion. They don't sufficiently *consider* the nature of religion, which was not designed to make us miserable, but happy; or how great a share even false notions in religion, or a bad habit of body, attended with a gloomy imagination, and lowness of spirits, have in producing this effect. To this it must, in part at least, be attributed, that they are quite overwhelmed with melancholy thoughts: whereas would they *consider* the infinite *goodness* and *mercifulness* of the divine nature, the *gracious allowances* made by the *gospel covenant* for human infirmities, the *sincerity* of all the *promises* and *declarations* we meet with in scripture; that we are to *divest* ourselves of our *passions* as much as possibly we can in judging of our state and character, and the proficiency we make in religion; of the *sad* and *sullen* as well as the *flattering* ones: would they *consider* this, and expostulate with themselves, *why restless? why cast down, O my Soul? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.* Tho' they might not be able quite to dispel the cloud, and throw off the load which

is on their spirits, their condition would be much more tolerable than it is; they would have less fear, less anguish and sorrow, less darkness; and more light mix'd with their darkness, more joy with their sorrow, and more hope with their fear. Perhaps, in time, they might come to enjoy a free and lightsome state of soul; be no more liable, as formerly, to groundless scruples and unaccountable jealousies; but by thinking frequently and impartially of things, be able to make a better judgment of them, see every object in its true shape and colours, and by that means discover the beauty of religion, and relish all the pleasures and satisfactions of *genuine piety*.

LET me now make a short *application* of this last part of my subject to *true christians*, and intreat them to *resume* the *practice* of a duty too much neglected; to spend a more *conscientious* allowance of their time in *pondering* things than is commonly done; that they may not be so apt to break bounds in their actions and passions, may be more *regular* in their conversation, more *active* in the discharge of their duty towards God and man, more *constantly devout*; more *free* from the *love* of the world, and the *influence* of the various *changes* of life; *greater friends* to the *peace* of the church, and the *interest* of *practical* religion, by rightly governing and tempering

pering their zeal ; and in a *better capacity* to enjoy all that *delight* and *comfort* which religion is so well fitted to afford. Who does not see that the duty here recommended rewards itself ? that in proportion as we think and meditate more seriously, more unbiassedly, more constantly, we shall live *better*, and consequently *happier* ; be more calm in our temper, more composed and steady in our conduct, and more prudent in our behaviour ; be a greater credit to religion, more useful in life, and more firmly fortified against the fears of death ? I shall therefore close all with this exhortation, That we *never* give occasion, or as *little* occasion as may be, for this charge to be brought against us, that *we do not consider*.





S E R M O N XIV.

The Corruptions among Christians
no just Objection against Christi-
anity.

GAL. ii. 17.

*But, if while we seek to be justified
by Christ, we ourselves also are
found sinners, is therefore Christ
the minister of sin? God forbid.*

IN these words St. Paul returns an answer to an objection, which might be raised against the doctrine of *justification by faith in Christ*, mentioned just before, *viz.* that this doctrine seems to countenance licentiousness. By no means, saith the apostle. For tho' they who seek justification by Christ (even the Jews themselves, who were not sinners, in the same sense that the Gentiles were, *i.e.* idolators) might be found sinners by the practice of wicked works; yet they were to know,

know, that the gospel gave no encouragement to such persons to hope for justification by Christ : for *Christ was not a minister of sin* ; no favourer or promoter of sin by his *doctrine*, any more than by his *example* : as he would have been, if the practice of holiness was no more necessary to our acceptance with God, according to the terms of salvation laid down in the gospel, than the observation of the law of *Moses*. And this will lead us into the sense of the 18th verse, and explain the connection of it with the words of the text ; *For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor : is Christ therefore the minister of sin ? God forbid.* No such thing ; for if I return to those evil practices which I had forsaken, (building up that fabric of vice which I had destroyed) *I hereby become a transgressor, or sinner, indeed ; but one of my own making* : not made so by the doctrines or precepts of the gospel, which, rightly understood and duly considered, must have a very different influence, and had so particularly on our apostle ; who tho' *dead to the law* (of ceremonies) yet *lived unto God*. *He was crucified with Christ*, in respect of the law, the world, and sin ; nevertheless, saith he, *I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me : and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God*, (as the great principle of my

my actions) *who loved me, and gave himself for me.* Having explained the text in its connection with the context, let us now proceed to a more *distinct* consideration of it. And,

I. WE may observe the *professors* of the gospel are described by the title of those, *who seek justification by Christ.*

II. 'Tis supposed that even *these may be found sinners.* However,

III. *THIS* is not to be charged upon Christ and his religion, as if he was the *minister of sin.* From whence I shall take occasion

IV. To enquire to *what* then we are to *impute* the great prevalency of *sin* in the *christian world.*

I. IN the words we may observe the *professors* of the gospel described by the title of those *who seek justification by Christ.* The Psalmist, to express the uncommon depravity of the age he lived in, speaking figurative language, saith, that ^a *the Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God: but they were all gone astray, they were altogether become foolish; there was none that did good, no not one.* This character did too

^a Psal. xiv. 2.

too well suit the generation of men to whom the gospel was first preached; not excepting the *Jews* themselves, to whom the apostle ^b *Paul* applies it. All the world was become guilty before God. In this deplorable, and, with respect to all ordinary means, desperate state of things, God of his infinite mercy was pleased ^c to send his only-begotten Son into the world, not to condemn and destroy the world, but that the world thro' him might have life. ^d Him did God anoint to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that were bruised; and, in a word, to proclaim the acceptable year of our Lord: that glorious and happy age, when all without distinction were invited to come in, and to receive ^e redemption thro' the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of all their sins past, with the promise and earnest of everlasting life. These glad tidings were published by the apostles of Christ, who being furnished with all necessary powers and instructions for that purpose, went forth and ^f taught all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. And the message they brought was at once so evidently

^b Rom. iii. 11, 12, 19.^c John iii. 16, 17.^d Luke iv. 18, 19.^e Eph. i. 7.^f Matt.

xxviii. 19. Mark xvi. 20.

dently divine, or from God, and so *worthy of all acceptance*, that great numbers every where believed, and professed the gospel; to their doing which, their chief inducement was, the hope of their being recovered by this mercy out of the miserable state into which they were fallen; or, as it is expressed in the text, that they should be *justified by Christ*, re-instated in the favour of God, and possessed of a covenant-title to immortality. This was their hope in becoming christians. And a most glorious motive it was, abundantly sufficient to prevail with all, who had a right notion of their condition, and seriously considered their true interest and happiness, to forsake every thing else in order to follow Christ. As on the other hand, without any such motive as this to recommend it, the preaching of the gospel would have met with very little success. For if they were to continue as uncertain as ever, with regard to the important doctrines of the *pardon of sin*, and the *happiness of a future life*, but few would have thought it worth their while to weigh the proposals which the gospel made them: but when they were assured of reconciliation with God, and all the happy consequences of it in time and to eternity, upon the most reasonable terms; this was a consideration alike fitted to work upon men of all nations, sects, tempers,

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tempers, capacities and conditions; *happiness* being *equally* the concern of *all*, and the *favour* of God as the *only* source and foundation of that happiness. And accordingly this consideration, that whosoever complied with the terms of the gospel-covenant should be *justified* and *saved*, proved effectual where none else would have done it. So that the first professors of the gospel might very well be described by the title of those, who *sought justification by Christ*. And the same holds true of all the followers of Christ now: whatever differences there are among them in other respects, in this they *all* agree, to *seek to be justified by Christ*. They may differ when they come to explain themselves, and one accuse the other of not being *sound* in the faith; but ask them all round, *who is their Saviour?* they will every one of them say, *Christ*. Ask them upon what they found their hope of acceptance with God to eternal life? and they will all answer upon what Christ, by the merciful appointment of God his Father, has done, and taught, and suffered as the *Redeemer* of mankind; on his life and death, and resurrection and ascension, and intercession for them at the right hand of God. In general then, all the professors of the gospel in every age of the world agree in this, that they seek to be *justified by Christ*. They don't seek it by the
law

law of nature, or the law of Moses, or any other law or institution, but only by the gospel; nor in any other method but that which they apprehend the gospel teaches. Observe, I don't say which the gospel really teaches, but which they apprehend it teaches, it being not only possible that christians may have a false notion of the terms of the gospel covenant; but certain, where contradictory notions are entertained, that one or other of them must be false.

II. 'Tis supposed, that even they who seek to be justified by Christ, may yet be found sinners. This was the case in the beginning, and 'tis to be feared is much more so now. All sought justification, but all did not obtain it. Their state was outwardly, but not inwardly changed. Many continued in their sins notwithstanding the deliverance offered them in the gospel. Great numbers had little else new but their name. They were still the servants of sin, and while such, could not be the servants of God, to whom they had dedicated themselves in baptism; nor in favour with him. It may be there was a reformation in some things, but not in all: sin was not thoroughly mortified; and not being mortified, was not pardoned. They were under condemnation, because they walked

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 * Rom. viii. 1.

after the flesh, and not after the Spirit. And if we take a view of the christian world as it is at *present*, shall we find things to be any *better*? alas! much worse. It is too evident, to be denied, that iniquity abounds every where, in one christian nation as well as in another, and in every part of the same nation. And tho' the corruption may not be risen to the same degree in all places, yet in all places 'tis very great. Those very persons who in *words* own Christ, and glory in him, in their *works* deny him, and are a disgrace to his religion. Should we follow the *multitude*, even among those who profess christianity, we should certainly go *wrong*. To see the lives of the generality of christians, and then judge from thence, who could imagine that they had any manner of concern about their deliverance from *sin*, when they indulge to it with the same freedom, as if they had no apprehension of any evil there was in it? Nor does sin cease to be *sin*, because 'tis practised by *christians*; but is the more *exceeding sinful* or criminal: so that they who would be sinners under the light or law of nature, or under the *legal dispensation*, are much more so under the *gospel*; which has not changed the natures of virtue and vice, but represented each in a much clearer light, and thereby increased our obligations to flee the *corruptions which*
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are in the world thro' lust; and to be holy in all manner of conversation. Sin, like a poisonous plant, has the same malignant and deadly qualities wherever it is found; and the venom of it, instead of being weakened, is more strong and exalted, where the *sun of righteousness* shines. And as sin is sin, tho' a professor of the gospel commits it, so ^h whoever commits sin, habitually and customarily, is a sinner. This is his proper character. He is under the power of sin, and let me add, ⁱ consequently under its guilt. His sins are all imputed to him, and will be so till he forsakes them by repentance and reformation of life; for *justification* and *sanctification* are not to be separated. The apostle Paul therefore, writing to the *Corinthians*, takes notice ^k that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God; of whom he names several sorts; adding, and such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. As much as to say, their being justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, depended upon their being sanctified by his Spirit. From whence we are warranted to lay down this as an universal rule, which has no exceptions; that every one who is a sinner by practice, is a sinner likewise

^h 1 John iii. 4, 8. ⁱ Rom. vi. 16.

^k 1 Cor. vi. 9.

likewise by *imputation*. *His faith hitherto is vain, he is yet in his sins*; and if he continues to live in sin, and dies in it, he will everlastingly perish. The sum is, that what the text supposes might be, *viz.* that they who *seek justification by Christ may yet be found sinners*, is too commonly a matter of *fact*. The number of *nominal* and *real* christians, is far from being the same. Men may call *Christ, Lord, Lord*, and yet *not do* the things which he commands them; to whom therefore he will say in the last day, *depart from me, I know ye not, ye workers of iniquity*. They are ^m *enemies to the cross of Christ*, how much soever they may glory in it; and accordingly *their end will be destruction*. But after all, we must not carry the matter too far, as if christianity had been of little or no effect, leaving the world just as it found it. They are not just to our religion, or to the professors of it, who will not allow that mankind are ever the better for it. Men were not only turned *from darkness to light* by the preaching of the gospel, but very often too *from the power of Satan unto God*; and became quite other persons than they had once been. A very early * writer of the *christian* church, speaking of the apostles, especially

¹ Matt. vii. 23.^m Philip. iii. 18, 19.

* Clemens Roman. 1 Epist. ad Cor.

Peter and Paul, has this remarkable passage. "To these men who led a divine life, there was an accession of a vast multitude of elect or excellent persons; who having suffered many reproaches and torments, left a most beautiful example to those who came after them." And indeed it was a *natural* and almost necessary effect of such an increase of divine knowledge as the gospel produced, that men should not be so much abandoned to all kinds of wickedness, as they were in a state of gross ignorance, and monstrous errors and superstitions. Take the several ages and nations under *heathenism*, or *judaism*, and *christianity*, and compare them, and it will not be found that *sin* has reigned so universally among *christians* as among other men. And then for examples of virtue and piety, of a heavenly temper, and of love to God and man; these have been far more numerous and more eminent, since *christianity* was established in the world. But then, tho' thanks be to God, the preaching of the gospel has not been without effect, great numbers in every age being justified, sanctified, and saved by it; yet it must be confessed, that this effect has not been so *considerable* as might have been *expected*; nor the *end* attained in any degree proportionable to the extraordinary nature of the *means*. However,

III. THIS

III. *THIS is not to be charged upon Christ and his religion: Is Christ the minister of sin?* saith the apostle, *God forbid.* There is not the least ground for such an imputation. Nothing that *Christ* has done or taught, nothing in his *example* or his *gospel*, when rightly understood, does in any manner or degree favour the love and practice of iniquity. If they who profess *faith in Christ*, and hope for *justification* by him, are after all *found sinners*; the reason is not, that it was never intended they should be found otherwise; God having limited his favour to a determinate number, so as to leave all others without a *possibility* of salvation: or for want of a *sufficient strictness* in the *precepts* of the *gospel*; or as if the *life of Christ* showed him to be a friend to sin; or that the *doctrines* of the *gospel*, particularly the doctrine of *justification by faith in Christ*, had a tendency to corrupt good manners; or, finally, that *Christ* has in the *gospel undertaken for more than he performs*: could any of these things be truly alledged, there would then be some ground for saying, that *Christ was the minister of sin.* But these things cannot be truly said.

I. THE reason why any who seek *justification by Christ* are *found sinners*, is not, that it was never intended they should be found

otherwise ; that *as many* are justified as God *originally* and *absolutely* decreed should be so, and that as to all *others* justification is *utterly* unattainable. We may be sure that this is not the true scheme of the gospel, because it makes *Christ the minister of sin*, with regard to those who perish. For if his coming into the world as to all such, and making known the gospel to them had no *other* tendency but to put them into a *worse* condition than they would else have been in ; to *heighten* the guilt of their sins, not to *remove* it ; and to *increase* their damnation, not to put them into a way of salvation : if this were really the case, what else would *Christ* be but a *minister of sin* in respect of the *guilt* of all such unhappy persons ? Might it not upon this supposition be as truly said of the *gospel*, as it was of the *law* in another sense ; *"that it entered that sin might abound, i. e.* in the imputation of it to everlasting punishment ? since this would not merely be the *event*, but the *necessary* and *designed* consequence. But God forbid we should any of us entertain a notion of the *gospel* which so greatly *dishonours* it, and supplies men with such an *unanswerable* apology for their continuance in sin. When *thro' Christ the forgiveness of sins was preached to all*, and all had

^a Rom. v. 20. • Acts xiii. 38, 39.
Mark xvi. 15, 16.

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had the offers of salvation made them ; shall we think that any were under an absolute incapacity of the blessings tendered them ; so that all the sins of such should really be as unpardonable as the *sin* against the *Holy Ghost*, and they *as much excluded* from the gospel salvation as the *devils* themselves ? where then would be their obligation to the mercy of God, in sending his son into the world to save sinners, when he was *never designed* to be a saviour of theirs ? how could they be bound to give thanks for the gospel, when they had not, and never could have, any benefit by it ; but instead of ^p *good tidings of great joy*, they could only regard it as a *sentence* of condemnation to them ? It would indeed be highly improper for those who did not know themselves to be in the number of the *elect*, to bless God for the gospel, in any other than some such *conditional* manner as this ; *if* it was intended as a blessing to *them*, they blessed God for it. I appeal to all unprejudiced persons, whether they who heard our Saviour inviting ^q *all who laboured and were heavy laden, to come unto him that they might have rest* : and telling his disciples, that *every one that asketh, receiveth* : and his apostles saying, ^r *repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ,*

C c 3

^p Luke ii. 10.

^q Matt. ii. 28. vii. 8.

^r Acts ii. 38.

Christ, for the remission of sins: whether, I say, they who heard Christ and his apostles making use of such *unlimited* language, would not necessarily conclude that *every one* was *equally* 'free to take of the waters of life'; and to come unto the 'marriage-supper of the lamb, who did not render himself unworthy of the "common salvation by his own inexcusable neglect? And was the world imposed upon only by fair words? shall we represent Almighty God as making a *feast* with the same insidious design as men have sometimes done it, only that they might *massacre* the guests; thereby *adding* the most detestable *treachery* to the most horrid *cruelty*? God forbid we should any of us think thus unworthily of him, and reproach the Son of God as ministering to the *guilt* of sin; nay, and to the *practice* of it too, by putting such a plea into the mouths of sinners as could not be answered. "For why, would "they say, are we *found sinners*, but because "we are made so; we *are not justified*, because we *cannot* be." And thus our Saviour's charge upon the Pharisees, might too justly, according to this representation of things, be retorted upon Christ and his apostles, "that they compassed sea and land to make men *proselytes*; and when they had done so, made a great

^f Isai. lv. 1.

^t Luke xiv. 16.

ⁿ Jude, ver. 3.

^v Matt. xxiii. 15.

great part of their converts *twofold more the children of hell and wrath than they were before.* These, and many other shocking absurdities, seem unavoidably to follow from that opinion of some (for which they are strangely zealous) that many *who seek to be justified by Christ, are found sinners,* because God *always determin'd* that they should. And therefore as we regard the honour of God, and would not have that holy name by which we are called blasphem'd, let us hold to this, that God is *true* in all his declarations, *sincere* in all his offers, and *faithful* in all his promises; and that our Saviour did not *express* more love to the children of men, than he *really* had, and still has in his *heart* towards them.

2. If the professors of christianity are *found sinners,* it is not for want of a *sufficient strictness* in the *precepts* of the gospel. What is said of the commandments of God, as published by *Moses,* that they are ** holy, and just, and good,* does much more eminently belong to them, as revealed by *Jesus Christ.* Some things were indulged to the *Jews,* ** because of the hardness of their hearts;* which tho' not absolutely evil, were such as would not have been permitted in other circumstances, not being so consistent with the higher degrees of perfection in the divine life.

C c 4

* Rom. vii. 12.

* Matt. xix. 8.

life. But the *christian* has no such indulgence as the *Jew* had ; no liberties are allowed him which might have the least tendency to strengthen his union with the present world, to gratify the carnal principle, and to take off the mind from unseen things. And the chief reason of this great strictness, and more exalted nature of the gospel-precepts, seems to be the clearer discoveries made to us under the gospel, of the invisible world. ^a *Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel* ; a state of transcendent and everlasting felicity is set before us in the plainest manner : the knowledge and hope of which requires more care, and diligence, and watchfulness, in respect not only of our outward actions, but the inward disposition of our minds ; that we may walk more worthy of the promised reward, and be better prepared to enjoy it. And accordingly, as nothing can exceed the christian revelation, with regard to the evidence of a future state, and the noble and inviting idea it gives us of its happiness ; so the rules of living which it prescribes us, while we are in this world, are proportionably exact and perfect. ^a *Our conversation is to be in heaven* ; where is ^b *laid up for us a crown of righteousness which fadeth not away* ; and from whence we look for the Saviour,

^a 2 Tim. i. 10.^a Phil. iii. 20.^b 2 Tim. iv. 8.

1 Pet. v. 4.

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Saviour, even *Jesus* the righteous: and a heavenly conversation will admit of nothing which betrays a sensual and an earthly mind. A heavenly conversation cannot be otherwise than regular and holy in every part of it. No; Christians must not lay it upon their *religion*, if they are defective in any virtue, or live in the practice of any sin; as if that did not command the virtues they neglect, or forbid the sins to which they indulge. Christianity is the farthest of any religion from being chargeable with any such thing. It justly glories in its morality, which makes a principal part of its evidence. We argue, that christianity came from God, because it is worthy to come from him; all its laws are divine, so admirably suited to the perfection of the divine nature, and fitted to perfect the nature of man, that we judge it no reproach to the wise and holy Governor of the world, to believe he sent them to us by the hand of his own Son. 'Tis true, the gospel speaks much of *liberty*: but surely true *liberty* is not the same with a *licence* to sin; nor does the gospel any where so understand the word, but, in the quite contrary sense, for a *freedom* from sin; setting a brand of infamy on those men, who while they *promised liberty* to their deluded followers, were *themselves servants of corruption*: adding, *of whom-*

whomsoever a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

3. IT is not owing to the example of Christ, if they who call themselves his followers are found sinners? since there was nothing in his life which shew'd him to be a friend to sin. As to the moralists among the heathen, they many times taught much better than they liv'd. * One of themselves complains after this manner: "How seldom shall we find a philosopher who behaves, and in his mind and life is form'd, so as reason requires? who regards his own doctrine not as an ostentation of his knowledge, but as a law of life? who is faithful to himself, and obeys his own precepts?" 'Tis no wonder therefore when the philosophers themselves, the great professors of wisdom in the pagan world, were thus faulty; if the common people fell yet shorter of their duty. The same objection is brought against the Pharisees by our blessed Saviour, ^d they say, and do not; upon which account he warns the multitude, while they observed every thing which was taught by these men agreeable to the word of God, not to do after their works. For at best, it was only an appearance of sanctity which they put on, being, for the greater part of them, utter strangers to the reality and power of

* Cic. Tusc. Quæst. lib. ii. c. 4. ^d Matt. xxiii. 3.

of it. But when our divine Master calls us to ^e *learn of him*, he, at the same time, sets before us a *pattern* worthy of our imitation. Nor would he have ventured to propose himself for an *example* to his followers, having so many enemies who were continual spies upon his conduct; nor his apostles to insist so much upon our having ^f *the same mind as Christ* had, and *walking as he walked*; if his *life* had not been such as to bear the exactest scrutiny. 'Tis granted, his enemies charged him with being a ^g *friend of publicans and sinners*; but on what did they ground this heavy charge? Not on any thing justly exceptionable in his own life; not on his violating the rules of the strictest morality in any one instance, but on his conversing in a friendly manner with *publicans* and *sinners*; which he did with much the same view as the *physician* goes to the houses of the *sick*, in order to cure them of their spiritual maladies. And to be a *friend of sinners*, in this sense, was a very different thing from being a *friend of sin*. On the contrary, his hatred of sin, joined with his love of mankind, was the very reason of this part of his conduct with which the *Pharisees* found so much fault. Being a lover of souls, he was willing to try every method to deliver them

^e Matt. xi. 29.

^f Phil. ii. 5. 1 John ii. 6.

^g Matt. xi. 19.

them from those vices which threaten'd them with ruin : and as much as he loved them with a love of *benevolence* or good-will, they must not expect to be the objects of his *delighting* love, till they consented to part with those sins which his soul hated. And the case is not altered since his being gone to heaven. He is the *Saviour* of *sinners*; this is his title and character, and therefore he encourages all to repent, and will reject none who do so : but ^h *he loveth righteousness, and hateth iniquity*; and, for that reason, can never receive any into his special favour and friendship, who, while they ⁱ *name the name of Christ*, take no care to *depart from iniquity*. Let all such consider the *life* of *Christ* here upon earth : do they find any thing in it favourable to any one kind or degree of sin? or to sinners refusing to forsake their sins? I dare answer, no. And what then is their hope, if they are *found sinners*, when neither the *precepts* nor *example* of *Christ* afford them the least handle on which they can lay hold? Is their refuge in the *doctrines* of the gospel? if so, it is certain that this refuge also will fail them. For,

4. THERE is nothing in the *christian doctrine*, particularly in the doctrine of *justification by faith*, which has the *least* tendency to corrupt good manners. The *doctrinal* part

^h Heb. i. 9. ⁱ 2 Tim. ii. 19.

part of our religion corresponds exactly with the *preceptive*; neither our Saviour nor his apostles having ever taught any thing, but what has a manifest subserviency to the same design, which the *precepts* and *example* of *Christ* appear so well fitted to promote. There is nothing said of the *supreme* Being which is not adapted at once to inspire the love of God, and *hatred* of every thing which is *evil*. We cannot act amiss if we imitate God, as he is represented in the writings of the *New-Testament*; which we might easily do, if he was any where described as a God who *declared* one thing, and *meant* another; as arbitrary and cruel, requiring *impossibilities* of some, and dispensing with things *necessary* in others; or as taking pleasure in *wickedness*; or, which is much the same thing, in the *wicked*, be they who they will. I say, if this were the truth of the case, *christians* would be in danger of going wrong, by conforming their temper and practice to the account given of the *divine conduct*. But the doctrine of the gospel, concerning the nature of God, and his manner of dealing with his rational creatures, is quite different; and therefore we may be safely ^k *followers of God as dear children*. I must farther own, that if what is said by some, of the *utter* impotence of man, and his being *merely*

^k Ephes. v. 1.

merely passive in the work of conversion, were the doctrine of the gospel, I should not be able to answer the objection against the gospel from hence, as *ministring*, or giving countenance to *sin*. For how natural would it be for men, who were not willing to leave their vices, to reason after this manner: “ It does not at all depend upon any thing I do, or can do, when I shall be converted: before the appointed time is come I can no more resist my lusts, than a senseless log of wood can help being carried down by the violence of the stream; and, on the other hand, when that happy time is come, I can no more *resist* the operations of divine grace, than before that I could the *torrent* of corruption. And why then should I trouble myself about that which is no part of my work and concern, but wholly of the Spirit of God? nay, I cannot entertain any thoughts about it, or do any thing in it, sooner, or farther, than God has absolutely determined I should.” This would frequently be the reasoning of sinners, and who could answer it upon these principles? For my part, if they pursue this notion into its *natural* consequences, I see no help for it, but they must be sealed up by it to perdition. But as those who have a real concern for their salvation, will not trust to the truth of such

principles, nor venture to *act* upon them, with whatever zeal and earnestness they may defend them; so to the honour of the *gospel* be it spoken, it delivers no such doctrine as this: but from one end of the *New-Testament* to the other supposes, that tho' men are very much *weakened* in their moral powers and capacities by the *fall*, and still *more* so by vitious *customs*; yet they are not without power to do all required of them, in order to their being converted and sav'd; *i. e.* that they are not without power to *improve* and to *concur* with the *grace* of God. Nor are our own endeavours any where represented as less necessary for the producing the effect, than the influences of divine *grace*: not but *grace* could perform the *whole* without any concurrence of ours; as 'tis certain whenever the work is done, the *principal* part is to be ascrib'd to *that*. But the thing to be consider'd, is not what God *can* do, but what we may *expect* he *will* do, and what he *actually* does: and this is only to *succeed* our sincere, tho' weak endeavours, not to *supersede* them, or render them needless. ¹ *That God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*, instead of excusing us from *working out our own salvation*; is the very argument made use of by the apostle why we should do it. If there be any doctrine of the *gospel*, which at first sight seems to encourage
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¹ Philip. ii. 12, 13.

men in a course of sin, it is that of *justification by faith in Christ*; but neither has this doctrine any such tendency, when rightly explain'd, but the quite contrary. For what is the sum of the gospel doctrine upon this head but this, that nothing more is necessary under the gospel to give us a title to everlasting life, but an *active obedient* faith in Christ. He is *justified* in the gospel sense of that word whom God deals with as righteous; not only *negatively* by not imputing his iniquities to him, but *positively* by conferring on him a covenant right to life and immortality. To obtain this justification, (*i. e.* the full pardon of all our sins, and a right to eternal life) all that the gospel requires of us is, such a firm belief of the things therein revealed, as is the seed and principle of true holiness, both in the heart and life. And what is there which in the least ministers to sin in all this? 'Tis very true, ^m *we are justified freely by the grace of God*; but the notion of *grace* or *mercy* does not imply any such thing as God's accepting us while we are in our *sins*; nor the notion of *free grace*, that he accepts us without any thing done on our part. The first is absolutely repugnant to the *holiness* of God; who never accepts those he does not delight in, or delight in any but those who are, in some degree, holy as he is holy.

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^m Rom. iii. 24.

holy : the latter is incompatible with his *wisdom*, which always suits his manner of governing rational beings to the nature which he has given them. And if it be asked, where then is the *freeness* of divine *grace*, if any thing be required of us? the answer is easy, That what is required of us, and what we perform, even when we do our utmost, is so far from *meriting* the promised reward, as not to bear the *least* conceivable proportion to it. The apostle *Paul* had such an abhorrence to this notion of divine *grace*, as vacating the obligation to holiness, that he asks with some indignation, *"What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid: how shall we who are dead to sin, (as all christians are by their profession) live any longer therein?"* 'Tis likewise true, that *we are justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*. But what is the meaning of this? is it that Christ hath redeemed any from the *guilt* of sin, whom he hath not redeemed from its *power*? or that the perfect *righteousness* of the *Redeemer* will supply the *total want* of righteousness in the *redeemed*? No; but that the compleat obedience and sacrifice of Christ is the great foundation, or, if you will, meritorious cause, of our justification in the sight of God; which, instead of weaken-

^a Rom. vi. 1, 2.

ing the argument for the necessity and advantage of a holy life, adds great strength to it: since God's requiring such a sacrifice to expiate for sin, and being so well pleased with the perfect virtue and sinless obedience of his own Son, as to reward it with a power of conferring immortal life and happiness upon his followers; shews us on the one hand, the great hatred and displeasure of God against sin; and on the other, the only way we can take to please him, *viz.* by resembling Christ in the holiness of his life, and his obedience unto death. Let us, as *Christ* did, obey and love God, and resign ourselves entirely to him; and then from the great acceptableness of Christ's obedience to the Father, we may be assured that we also shall be *accepted in the Beloved*. It must farther be own'd to be a scripture expression, ° *that God justifies the ungodly*; certainly not those that *are*, but those who *have been* ungodly. In order to any one's being receiv'd to *mercy*, the question is, not what he has been, but what he is now willing, and resolved, and prevailingly disposed to become: for if he has been never so great a sinner, provided he be truly penitent, all his sins shall be blotted out by God for his goodness sake, in Jesus Christ our Lord. But all the encouragement this gives, is to *forsake* our sins; since

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since in that case we are sure of *finding* mercy : not to *continue* in sin, because as long as we do so, we lie under condemnation, and are in danger of being surpriz'd by death in a state of sin, which will consign us over to the judgment of the great day, and from thence to *everlasting punishment*. Farther, that we are *justified by faith without the deeds of the law*, is no more to be doubted, than the truth of the gospel : and because we are justified by *faith*, some may be ready to think it a plain consequence from hence, that *good works* are not necessary to our justification. But this proceeds upon a mistake of the apostle's design, which is only to prove against the *judaizing* christians, that we are justified by the *grace* of the *gospel*, without any assistance from the *law* of *Moses*. And what was to be inferred from hence ? why that men needed not to be solicitous about the observation of the *mosaic* law, that being of no force or obligation under the *gospel* : and this they might believe without any danger of becoming more remiss in the practice of holiness ; forasmuch as the *ceremonial* law had nothing intrinsically good in it, and the *moral* law (summarily comprehended in the ten commandments, and more briefly still in these two great commandments of

the *love* of God and our *neighbour*) tho' no longer to be considered as the law of *Moses*, is so far from being abolished by the gospel, as to be thereby interpreted and enforced in a higher sense, and a more powerful manner, than it was ever before. Only remember this, that where-ever St. *Paul* speaks degradingly of *works*, it is only of the *works* of the *mosaic* law, which the *Jews* would fain have put upon a level with *faith* in *Christ*; or of such other *works* as were not *truly* good; not of works of *evangelical* righteousness: let us only remember this, and we shall be under no temptation to think, that our being *justified* by *faith* is the least encouragement to a wicked life, or does any way slacken the obligations, and destroy the motives to a good one. In a word, altho' perfect sinless obedience be not insisted on as an indispensable condition of our acceptance with God, but we are justified by a *faith* productive of *sincere*, tho' *imperfect* obedience; yet it cannot be justly said, that *Christ*, by thus lowering the terms of salvation, is become the *minister of sin*. For what is it that *Christ* does? does he require *less* in respect of real holiness and virtue, than was required at any time before since the *fall*; or less than he might do consistently with the design of God to save sinners, and to reward imperfect virtue? by no means. He requires, tho' not *perfect*, yet

yet *sincere* obedience, which is all we can render in our fallen state; and hereby he does not only *oblige*, but more effectually *excite* and *encourage* men to do their utmost, both out of gratitude to God for his unspeakable goodness to them, and because they know it will not be in vain. Whereas if no hopes were given men of *justification*, but upon the terms of the covenant of innocence or perfection; as a revelation upon this ground could never answer the end of bringing any one person among never so many millions to happiness; so by driving men to despair, it would deprive them of all strength and spirit, and make them apprehend themselves excused in doing nothing, when nothing they could do would be to any purpose. From all which, 'tis evident, that the gospel doctrine of *justification* by *faith* in *Christ*, has not, any more than the other doctrines of the *New-Testament*, the least tendency to corrupt the manners of mankind. If men are *found sinners*, the reason is not that this or any other doctrine of the gospel gives them encouragement to be sinners. Finally,

5. IF christians are *found sinners*, the reason is not that Christ in the gospel has *undertaken for more than he performs*. This cannot be suppos'd, without supposing the gospel itself to be an imposition upon the world.

world. For if the gospel be really from God, as it challenges our belief that it is, then God himself is in honour bound to verify every thing which the gospel declares and promises. When the gospel was preach'd to the world, that ^a *God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake unto the fathers by the prophets, did then speak to mankind by his own Son, who came in the name of God, cloathed with his authority, had ^r all power committed to him in heaven and earth, and was declared ^t to be that person who should judge the quick and the dead. The ⁱ doctrines, the promises, the spirit of Christ, are the doctrines, the promises, the spirit of God. ^u Christ and the Father are one: so that, in short, of all those things which the gospel undertakes, such as the *renovation, justification, and salvation* of them who *believe*, there cannot be the least failure without a reflection upon God himself, either his *power*, or his *faithfulness*; unless we suppose the gospel, instead of being a revelation from God, to be only a human invention. But that the gospel or religion of *Christ* is from God, has been proved a thousand times over with the greatest evidence, and to the conviction of all but such as are resolved not to believe; and, besides, is taken for granted as*

^a Heb. i. 1. ^r Matt. xxviii. 18. ^t Acts xvii. 31. ^u John x. 30.

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as a common principle among the professors of christianity. And as for the power and faithfulness of God, the all-perfect being, they are less liable still to be questioned than the other; these with all other perfections being necessarily included in the idea of God: and therefore we may be confident wherever the fault lies, it shall not be on God's part. Our destruction will be of *ourselves*; not from any deficiency in him who is called *our Saviour*: since *he is able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him*; and is as *merciful and faithful* as he is able. Forasmuch then as this is *not to be charged upon Christ and his religion*, that so many who seek justification by Christ are yet found sinners, Christ not being in any sense or degree *the minister of sin*; let us proceed therefore

IV. To enquire to what we must *impute* the great *prevalency* of *sin* in the *christian world*; and this shall be the subject of the next discourse.

¶ Heb. vii. 25.

¶ ch. ii. 17.



SERMON XV.

Of the Causes of the Corruptions
among Christians.

GAL. ii. 17.

But, if while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore the minister of sin? God forbid.

IN a former discourse on these words, I proposed to treat the following observations.

I. **THE** professors of the gospel are described by the title of those, who seek justification by Christ.

II. 'TIS supposed that even *these* may be found sinners.

III. **THIS** is not to be charged upon Christ and his religion, as if he was the minister

minister of sin. These observations I have treated, and I now proceed

IV. To *enquire* to *what* then we are to *impute* the *great prevalency* of *sin* in the *christian* world. This is a very surprizing appearance at first sight; that notwithstanding ^a Christ is *the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world*; and he had his ^b name *Jesus* given him upon this very account, that *he saves his people from their sins*; the world should be over-run as it is with sin and wickedness. What account can be given of this strange appearance? or can none at all be given which is satisfactory? Yes, as I apprehend it, there may be. And in order to your being better able to conceive how this comes to pass, I would desire your attention to the following particulars.

I. ALTHO' christians belong to the church of God from their very nativity, as anciently the people of the *Jews* did, so as to be inclosed from the rest of the world by the gospel-covenant; yet they are born with the *same natural constitutions* as other men, and have the *same infirmities*, and *passions*, and *inclinations*. The apostle *Paul* indeed tells the *Corinthians*, that whereas in case of the parents *unbelief*, ^c the *children would be unclean*; being born of *believing* parents,

^a John i. 29. ^b Matt. i. 21. ^c 1 Cor. vii. 14.

parents, they were *holy*. But what is this holiness? 'tis only *fæderal*. They are *consecrated* to God, and under his *peculiar* care and protection; notwithstanding which, there is no such change in respect of their *natural* and *fleshly* inclinations, as exempts them, in growing up to years of maturity, from the temptations to which the rest of mankind are liable. The bodies of christians are not framed after a different manner, either *external* or *internal*; they are not restored to that happy temperature and equality in which the body of the first man was created, and which it enjoyed as long as he continued innocent. The passions of the lower animal life are naturally inordinate, not only in those who are born without the pale of the christian church, but in those likewise who are born within it. I don't find that in this particular the christian has any preheminance above other men. As he dies, so he is born like them, subject to the same weaknesses, and tempted in all respects as they are. God does not see fit to make any alteration in the constitution and course of nature, but leaves this as it was before he sent his Son into the world to redeem it; the design of this redemption not being to free the world *immediately* from those *natural* evils which abound in it. 'Tis certain that our natural passions are not so

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obsequious to the dictates of *reason* as they might be, and as 'tis likely they would have been, if the state of innocence had continued. At the *resurrection* of the *just*, we are sure the body will be made more subservient to the soul in all its operations; and our redemption from all evils, whether *natural*, *moral*, or *penal*, will be compleat. But at present 'tis much otherwise; and the reason probably is this, that the present is a state of probation; the consequence of which is, that God permits inclinations to be as it were born and grow up with us, by which we are solicited to take up our happiness in this world, and to transgress our duty in many instances.

2. ALTHO' the *grace* of the gospel is *abundantly sufficient* to heal the disorders of nature, and to govern and subdue its strongest inclinations; yet to the *effectual* working of this *grace*, the *christian's own concurrent endeavours* are required. The grace of God was never intended to destroy the *liberty* of man. We are naturally free agents, have a power of chusing or refusing, of going right or wrong. All the commands, and exhortations, and promises of the gospel suppose such a power as this, because otherwise they would have no meaning in them, and of themselves could have no effect. What the *grace* of God undertakes is, to *help* our
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infirmities, not to *bear down* our stubbornness and obstinacy by mere might; to save us if we do what we can for our own salvation, not if we do all we can against it. There is no such promise that God will convert us in spite of the most wilful opposition that we can make to his *grace* and *spirit*. No, the *grace* of God is not to be prostituted at this rate. If God has given us active powers, he expects we should use them; and to encourage us to use them, he offers us the assistance of his *grace*, by which every thing shall be made possible to us, which he requires of us; *possible* to be *done*, not *impossible* to be *neglected*. Our compliance is not necessitated: let us remember this, and we shall not so much wonder that men do evil, when the *grace* of God would enable them to do good.

3. ALTHO' the *motives* of the gospel are *wonderfully fitted* to engage our concurrence with the *grace* which it offers us, yet that is only on condition they are *known* and *considered*. No degree of strength and allure-ment is wanting which can be desired in them: for what motives can be imagined more forcible and prevailing in their own nature, than the *mercies* of God, the *love* of a *Saviour*, the *glories* of the *heavenly* world? have not all these something constraining in them? something by which the soul is
secretly

secretly and powerfully excited to exert all its faculties, and to give itself to the influences of the divine Spirit? But how do these motives constrain the *will*, and affect the *heart*? no otherwise than by the mediation of the *understanding*. We must be acquainted with them, and seriously and attentively ponder them, before we can feel their genuine influence on our minds, disposing us to follow the directions given us in the way to eternal happiness. *Moral* motives do not actuate the soul after the same manner as springs and weights move a clock: these latter produce their effect by a blind and physical impulse, not so the former. Here the mind must retire into itself, collect its scatter'd thoughts, center them upon the objects which the gospel proposes to its consideration, apprehend its own highest interest, fix its chief end, in order to its being drawn to the pursuit of it, deliberate on the most proper means, and then determine and resolve. So that here's a chain of actions dependent upon the mind itself; without which, all the motives of the gospel, tho' never so important, are, as it were, thrown away upon us. Now from all this it follows,

4. T H A T there are a great *many* things which, if not *immediately*, yet without *due care*, must have a fatal influence upon

upon the professors of christianity to corrupt and destroy them. I shall name a few of these *causes*, to which we are to ascribe the *corruptions* of christians.

I. THE first is *ignorance*. And 'tis lamentable to consider how great this is among multitudes of christians; who, though the *children of light*, in respect of the religion they profess, have their minds overspread with thick *darkness*. In a great part of the christian world, the *key of knowledge* is taken from the common people; the free use of the scriptures in their own tongue is forbidden them: and when the candle is put under a bushel, can we wonder if it give no light to those who are in the house? In other places, what a wretched neglect is there of the means of knowledge? people might know more, but don't desire it; nay, they affect the contrary: they shut their eyes against the light, and hate instruction. Now the natural effect of ignorance, whether proceeding from the *want* of means, or from the *wilful neglect* of them, is depravity of manners; such persons, as to those things of which they are ignorant, being much upon a level with them who never heard of a Saviour. The *name of Christ* is indeed known to these, and they have been taught some *general* truths relating to the method of salvation by him; but of the particular doctrines

doctrines and precepts of the gospel, they have, perhaps, none, or very confused apprehensions : and by this means, *their foolish hearts being darkned*, they are continually wandering in the ways of sin and folly. Here, indeed, there is a great difference to be made between the two sorts of persons before-mentioned, *viz.* those who are ignorant for want of the means of knowing better ; and those who enjoy the means and opportunities of knowledge, but do not improve them. In the former, the little knowledge they have may be attended with an honest heart ; and in that case, thro' the *mercy* of God, and the secret influences of his *grace*, may prove sufficient to guide them in the way to heaven : whereas a voluntary and affected ignorance, as it discovers a bad temper of mind, and is occasioned by a vicious course of life ; so it evidently tends to promote every corrupt disposition and practice. There is a natural connection between ignorance and vice ; for when the irregular passions of men excite them to do those things which they ought not, and they have no knowledge, or not a sufficient degree of it to give a check to their passions ; what is there else left to restrain them ? The *grace* of God, 'tis true, can do it ; but this *grace* works in a *moral* way, *i. e.* by the light of the mind, and on subjects qualified by a proper *moral disposition* :

disposition : and therefore where the light of the mind is wanting, and wanting through choice, the way to destruction is almost unavoidable.

2. THE *difficulty* of going *contrary* to the *reigning inclinations* of the heart is another cause of the prevailing corruptions. I observed before, that christians are born with the same fleshly inclinations and animal passions as other men ; and there being a great suitableness betwixt these, and the objects and enjoyments of the present world, it will demand our most resolute and vigorous endeavours effectually to withstand them. Now men generally are too *slothful* ; they don't care to take the pains necessary in religion : there is immediate pleasure in gratifying the passions, and that carries it against the pleasure which they may propose to reap from the conquest of them. For the first, there is no need of any labour, for the latter there is. The same reasons which kept so many from taking up the profession of the gospel, when it was first preached to the world, hinder thousands from obeying it, who profess to believe the truth of it. ^d *The kingdom of heaven is resembled to a king, who made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants, at supper-time, to say to them that were bidden, come, for all things are ready.* But 'tis said,

^d Matt. xxii. 2, &c.

said, *they all with one consent began to make excuse, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandize.* That is, there was some lust or other, the gratification of which they preferred to all the offers the gospel made them, and so without more ado they rejected it; not thinking it worth their while to inquire what doctrines this new religion taught, or what credentials it brought with it of its truth. And much the same folly is acted over in every age among christians themselves. They are put in mind that they must be christians in *practice*, as well as in *profession*, and are intreated to make ready for the kingdom of heaven; but the greater part being hurried away by their sensual and worldly inclinations, will not be persuaded to consider and pursue the *things of their peace*; and so must expect to meet with the same treatment as the man who *had not on the wedding-garment*; to whom the king, when he came to see his guests, said, *Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment?* This question was asked with that majesty and terror that he was *struck speechless*: whereupon the king said to the servants, *bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* Thus shall it be with all those who prefer the pleasing

of their *lusts* to the pleasing of their heavenly master; which is the case of a great part of the christian world.

3. *Inconsideration*, or an aversion to meditate on *unseen* things, is another cause of the prevailing corruption of the christian world. The rewards by which the gospel offers to make the professors of it amends for *denying themselves, and all ungodliness, and worldly lusts*, are out of sight; and being so, are most commonly out of mind too. The consequence of this is, that the temptations taken from present and sensible things are too successful. It is, no doubt, a wise bargain, and must be so acknowledged by all who consider it, to part with the whole world, if we had it, and with life itself, in order to gain everlasting life and happiness, which is the promise of our Saviour to all his true disciples. But in vain does heaven itself court our acceptance, if we cannot be persuaded to contemplate the happiness of it, its refined nature, immense greatness, and eternal duration: and how few are there with whom we can prevail by our most earnest and repeated intreaties to consider this?

O curvæ in terris animæ & celestium inanes!

The minds of men are bent downward to the earth, as that person's body was of whom

whom we read in the gospel, who ^e *having a spirit of infirmity, was bowed together, and could by no means lift up herself.* They are chained to sensible things; *i. e.* they suffer themselves to be so, because they accept not the assistance offered them, to raise their thoughts and affections heaven-ward. They had rather follow sense and fancy, than *walk by faith.* ^f *Faith is the evidence of things not seen, and the substance of things hoped for.* ^g *Faith will give us the victory over the world;* *i. e.* it will do it if we let it have an opportunity to exert its divine influence. Let us shut our eyes upon the present world, in order to open them upon the world to come; and by heavenly contemplation draw aside the veil betwixt us and the great realities of the everlasting state, and we shall quickly find that the blessedness of heaven does not want any attractives in it. A single contemplation of such glorious objects will make some impression; and if it be repeated from time to time, the impression will be deep and lasting; so as that we shall be enabled easily to answer all the arguments for a sinful life with which the world can assault us. 'Tis next to impossible that a life of faith and contemplation should not be a life of holiness: and therefore that christians do not more generally lead such a

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life

^g Luke xiii. 11.^f Heb. xi. 1.^g 1 John v. 4.

life as the gospel requires, we must impute to this as one principal cause, their not meditating on unseen and eternal things. Such meditations would gradually purify and exalt the carnal mind, but are very disagreeable to it, and for that reason too generally neglected.

4. *THE many angry and uncharitable parties* into which the christian world is unhappily divided, have not a little *contributed* to the *corruption of christian manners*. This effect is not owing *merely* to a *diversity of opinions*, which in the present state of things is unavoidable; but to the *over great stress* which is laid by each party upon its *distinguishing tenets*; and the *meritoriousness* of contending for them with *intemperate* zeal and passion. For, alas! by this means the zeal of christians is turned into a wrong channel; the war against the world and their lusts, in which all christians are equally concerned, is changed into a state of hostility amongst christians themselves; and to be more than ordinarily earnest and active in maintaining some favourite opinions, hardly allowing that those of the contrary side can have a covenant title to salvation, is made to serve instead of the substantial duties and virtues of the christian life. Were christians more universally agreed, that there was no *virtue* in being of this or that opinion, where there

was

was not a *good* life; and where there was, *no crime* in being of the *contrary*, after persons had *sincerely* endeavoured to know the truth; there would then be no room for men thus to deceive themselves, and to mistake that for *love* to the *gospel*, which is nothing else but a *proud* conceit of their *own* understandings. Then do men best express their affection to *Christ* and his *gospel*, when by a charitable and heavenly temper of mind, and a holy and regular conversation, they *imitate* the one, and *adorn* the other. And the more solicitous they were about this, the less concerned would they be for the differences between them and other good christians in things disputable; and less apt to give any countenance to persons whose lives were a disgrace to their profession, only for the sake of their holding the same opinions. 'Tis really a melancholly consideration, that while all sides are wrangling about articles of faith, and modes and ceremonies of worship, they should so generally forget that which is of the greatest consequence of all, a *strict* and *humble* piety, and a *diffusive* benevolence, or *charity*.

5. *A false notion of gospel justification* is, I doubt, a frequent *cause* that they who seek to be justified by *Christ* are yet found sinners. As long ago as the apostle *James* wrote his epistle, there were some who abus'd this

important doctrine of the christian religion, hereby making that which is really its glory, to be a scandal to the christian faith, and the occasion of their own ruin. These self-deluded souls relied upon *faith without works*, which is the ground of that question; ^h *what does it profit, my brethren, tho' a man say he has faith, and have not works? can faith save him?* No; *faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone.* Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how *faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?* And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Can any words be plainer than these are? and is it not amazing then, that, after so clear and full a decision of the case, any who own the authority of the apostle James, should espouse an error, which he so expressly condemned; sheltering themselves under the authority of St. Paul; as if the inspired penmen of scripture could contradict one the other? St. Paul and St. James levelled their discourses against two different sorts of persons; those whom St. Paul opposes were *Legalists*, who would

^h James ii. 14, &c.

would fain have advanced the law of *Moses* into a partnership with the gospel of *Christ*; those opposed by *St. James* were *Solifidians*, who expected to be justified by faith, without those works of holiness which the gospel requires. In opposition to the former, the apostle *Paul* asserts very truly, that we are *justified without the works of the law*; the law being no longer in force: as *Abraham* also was justified without the same sort of works, living some hundreds of years before the law was given from mount *Sinai*, and being justified before he was circumcised. In opposition to the latter, the apostle *James* asserts, with the same truth, that *no man is justified without works, i. e. without works of evangelical righteousness*; according to which we shall be justified or condemned in the last day. And so far is the apostle *Paul* from teaching a contrary doctrine to that of *St. James*, that he speaks as highly in commendation of *works of holiness*, and faith as much of the *necessity* of them, as *St. James* himself has done, or any one can do; in several places of his *epistles* explaining that faith of *Abraham*, and other good men of which he saith such great things, in a manner which includes an *active obedience*, and *intire resignation* to the will of *God*: particularly in the 11th chap. of the

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epistle

1 Rom. iii. 28. Ch. iv. 1.

epistle to the *Hebrews*; where he celebrates the faith of *Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses*, and others, for the glorious fruits which sprung from it, such as *pleasing God, preparing* for distant events, as if they were in sight, *leaving their native country*, readily *sacrificing* their best-lov'd comforts, and *choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*. 'Tis therefore a most dangerous thing for persons to be told, and to believe, that *good works* flowing from faith, have no share at all, not even a *subordinate* one, in our *justification* before God; that they are not necessary to our acceptance with God, nor the *condition* of our *final* salvation: all which, with a great deal more to the same purpose, is said by some, and too much of it by others. And tho' honest and well-meaning souls are not overthrown by such doctrines, yet too many others make them a handle for their encouragement in the ways of sin, and are hardened to their everlasting ruin; which, one would think, should teach all those who are friends to the cause of practical holiness, to examine the tendency of their notions more narrowly, and to talk with more caution and reserve upon this head.

I might have named a great many other causes, which concur in producing this deplorable

plorable corruption of the christian world; such as, for instance, the *influence* of bad *examples*, especially of *superiors*: persons, particularly *parents*, not *discharging* the duties of their several *relations*. A *wicked* parent propagates his *vices* as he does his *kind*; the *negligent* parent *leaves* the minds of his children *unfurnished*, and lets those weeds spring up, and spread themselves abroad, which he should make it his business to root out; and the parent who is *indiscreet*, too often *prejudices* his children against religion, by giving them *wrong* representations of it, and taking *improper* methods to impress a sense of it upon their tender minds: the serious consideration of which should excite *religious* parents (who are the only persons from whom it can be expected) to use all the care and prudence possible in the education of their children. But as the considerations before insisted on will sufficiently account for the prevalency of sin in the christian world, I shall not enlarge on these last mentioned.

FROM all that has been said, let us be warned to take heed, that while we *seek to be justified by Christ*, none of us be *found sinners*: for, alas! it will avail us little to make our *boast* of the gospel, if by *breaking* the *precepts* of it, we *dishonour* God, and forfeit all right to his covenant favour. In order to our being awakened to a suitable
concern

concern in this matter, let us carry in mind these two things, with which I shall conclude; that notwithstanding all our advantages by *Christ*, there is *danger* of our being *found sinners* at last; and that if we are, we shall be absolutely *without excuse*.

I. THERE is no little *danger*, notwithstanding all our advantages by *Christ*, of our being *found sinners* at last. We have *passions* which are easily inflamed; and the world has *temptations* in abundance, which are fitted to set them on fire. There are *many false ways* which we shall be apt to strike into, and *but one right*, and they who walk in the right way are but *few*. We are in danger of deceiving *ourselves*, and of being deceiv'd by *others*; of being drawn away by our own hearts lusts, or by the inticements of sinners, and the allurements of sense; of being undone by *false notions* of the *terms* of salvation, or *false hopes* of a more convenient opportunity for securing it, than the present. In the midst of so many snares and temptations, our danger is too great to be slighted by us, if we are wise. 'Tis a vain thing for any one to think he is in no danger, while he continues in a course of sin. Is there no danger if he does not immediately forsake his sins, that he may never do it? and if he die impenitent, is not his

his destruction certain and inevitable; notwithstanding all that God has done, and Christ has suffered in order to save him?

2. IF any, while they *seek* and *hope* for *justification by Christ*, are *found sinners*, they will be absolutely *inexcusable*. Their ruin will be intirely of their own procuring. They have no encouragement from the gospel to continue in sin; but all the encouragement that can be desired to forsake it. *Christ is not the minister of sin*, but is very ready to be their *Saviour from it*: from the guilt of it by his blood, and from the dominion of it in the heart and life by his word and spirit. Nor will he, I may also say, nor can he, save them from one of these, unless he saves them from both. So it is said by St. John: *‘If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, i. e. if we are holy as he is holy, then we have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. Then, if we walk according to the light of truth, but not otherwise. Do you not see how the merciful Redeemer of the world stands with open arms, and melting affections of heart, to receive all those who come unto him! but then there is no coming to Christ without leaving our sins. And what is there that can tempt men to prefer their sins to their Saviour? the momentary*

mentary gratifications of sin to everlasting happiness? Surely they can have nothing to offer in alleviation of their guilt and folly, who might have been renewed, and pardoned, and saved, and wilfully put all these blessings from them!

LET us, my friends, be persuaded to consider these things; and in well-doing commit ourselves to the mercy of God, thro' the mediation of his well-beloved Son. Upon this condition, that we sincerely endeavour to do the will of God, as we cannot think too highly of the righteousness of our Saviour, so we cannot rely too confidently upon it; *being found in him, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification now; and compleat and eternal redemption at last.*

*1 Cor. i. 30. Philip. iii. 9.

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